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ABSTRACT

This report contains four separate articles of interest to adult English-as-a-second-language (ESL) educators. "Learning Disabilities in Adult ESL: Case Studies and Directions" (Dorothy Almanza, Kate Singleton, Lynda Terrill) looks at three case studies of adult ESL students whom teachers have identified as possibly learning disabled. Research has indicated that adult ESL students who do not make progress as expected may benefit from quiet surroundings and tutorials. "Alternative Assessment: Exploring Affective Benchmarks of Progress" (Betty Lynch, Susan Otero, Jennifer Slater, Carol H. Van Duzer) is designed as a follow-up to a previous study, the Alternative Assessment Integrated Research Project. The earlier study identified ways to assess student skills, to determine student perceptions and attitudes about learning and assessment, and to identify student goals and literacy practices. This study continues this work by exploring the benchmarks of affective behavior identified in the first study. "Individual Acculturation and Language Learning" (Vesna Dovis) is a case study of students on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, focusing on their various experiences of adjustment to life in America. A technical discussion of "Spanglish" is included. "Cyber This and Cyber That: Negotiating Computer Learning" (Suzanne Cockley) examines the ways 17 adult educators have learned to use their computers in instruction. Their experiences are examined in light of the Stages of Literacy Development research by O'Donnell and Wood. References, appendices, and data are included in the various papers as appropriate. (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education) (KFT)

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

Volume 5: 1995-1996

Reports of Research Conducted by Adult Education Practitioner-Researchers in Virginia

Distributed by:

THE VIRGINIA ADULT EDUCATORS RESEARCH NETWORK

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Introduction

The Virginia Adult Educators' Research Network promotes and supports practitioner-research among the Adult Education teachers in Virginia. During the past year, several practitioners, working alone or in teams, participated in the Network by designing and conducting research projects within their own programs. The following reports represent their efforts.

Research practitioners come from geographic areas throughout the Commonwealth and work in a variety of Adult Education settings. Their "research laboratories" are their classrooms, their "subjects" are their students and fellow teachers, and their audience is the adult education practitioner who wishes to learn from another's experience.

Each Practitioner-Researcher begins with his or her own experience and level of knowledge and builds from there. The resulting reports vary in length and scope but each reflects growth and a deepening understanding of adult learning and individual practice.

Copies of this Year in Review, as well as Volumes 1 - 4, are available from the Research Network office and from the Virginia Adult Education & Literacy Resource Center in Richmond. Copies of individual reports are also available.

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Abstracts and Biographies

5.1 Learning Disabilities in Adult ESL: Case Studies and Directions

Dorothy Almanza, Kate Singleton, and Lynda Terrill

This report looks at three case studies of adult ESL students whom teachers have identified as possibly learning disabled. The researchers used both formal and informal interviews along with document analysis and a literature search to design their study. Themes running throughout the case studies suggest that adult ESL students who do not make progress as expected may benefit from quiet surroundings and tutorials. They also indicate that most adults are able to characterize their learning difficulties and suggest learning activities which they find helpful. The researchers also found that in working with these cases, as in much of life, you cannot always successfully address every problem.

Dorothy, Kate, and **Lynda** teach ESL classes at Arlington Education and Employment Program (REEP) in Arlington, Virginia.

5.2 Alternative Assessment: Exploring Affective Benchmarks of Progress

Betty Lynch, Susan Otero, Jennifer Slater, Carol H. Van Duzer

This important study was designed to follow up on a previous study, the Alternative Assessment Integrated Research Project, conducted by the Arlington Education and Employment Program (REEP). The original study identified ways to assess student performance and skills, to determine student perceptions and attitudes about learning and assessment, and to identify student goals and literacy practices. Van Duzer, et al have continued this work by exploring the benchmarks of affective behaviors identified in the first study. They began by defining level-appropriate benchmarks, identifying ways to document the benchmarks as they appear in class, and developing a process to analyze the findings. The report discusses the process of classroom documentation, as well as the practical difficulties encountered while trying to do too many things at once. The authors suggest several areas for future research, including improved ways to capture evidence of behaviors, the development of tools for students to use for self-assessment, and ways in which the sharing and dissemination of teachers' ways of documenting evidence may be facilitated.

Betty, Susan, Jennifer, and **Carol** work with ESL classes at the Arlington Education and Employment Program (REEP) in Arlington, Virginia.

5.3 Individual Acculturation and Language Learning
Vesna Dovis

Vesna has conducted a study of the characteristics of individual acculturation in the Eastern Shore community where she lives and teaches. After giving a detailed description of the students she interviewed, the author discusses the ways in which her ESL students have adjusted to life in America. The report includes an interesting discussion of "Spanglish", a blend of English and Spanish spoken by many ESL students on the Eastern Shore. In addition to the technical discussion of this language, it is also presented as a manifestation of cultural blending.

Vesna teaches ESL and Spanish evening classes at the Eastern Shore Community College. During the day she translates at the Nassawadox Medical Center and in the courts.

5.4 Cyber This and Cyber That: Negotiating Computer Learning
Suzanne Cockley

Based on a state-wide survey and 17 interviews, this inquiry project examines the ways in which adult educators have learned how to use their computers. The author suggests a framework of stages through which computer learners pass as they acquire various computer-related skills. The report also includes a discussion of the similarities between this proposed framework and the Stages of Literacy Development, as presented by O'Donnell and Wood (1992). In addition, comparisons are drawn between the characteristics of adult computer learners and adult literacy learners.

Sue served as Coordinator of the Virginia Adult Educators' Research Network and is now the Director of the Adult Degree Completion Program at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Virginia.

Learning Disabilities in Adult ESL: Case Studies and Directions

Dorothy Almanza, Kate Singleton, and Lynda Terrill

Like others teachers in adult ESL, teachers at REEP (Arlington Education and Employment Program) have been searching for ways to help adults who don't make expected progress in class. The three of us had taught many of the same students who didn't seem to make progress from year to year. We decided to use the auspices of the Virginia Adult Educators' Research Network to look for some answers, or at least to give us the impetus to ask good questions. For our year-long project, we defined a problem and asked questions:

> The teachers at REEP have worried about effective ways to help adult ESL students in our program who may be "learning disabled". We've decided that it is not helpful to our students to actually expend time and resources to define exactly who is "learning disabled" and in what ways. We decided that focusing on educational jargon would not further the goals of our students, even if we felt we were able to make judgments. We also felt that, without resorting to labels, teachers could easily identify students who do not make expected progress in the classroom or the computer lab. We wonder how we can give appropriate and specific attention to such students in our learner-centered program. This is our general topic: "How can teachers assist adult ESL students who may be 'learning disabled' to acquire and retain basic literacy in a learner-centered classroom or computer lab?" Within this topic we asked several more specific questions:
>
> 1. Do we find students with special needs clustered in certain classes or in the computer lab?
> 2. How do these students perceive themselves as related to their fellow students and to school in general?
> 3. How can we help students to express needs, goals, and frustrations related to their difficulties?
> 4. Can we, or should we, try to distinguish between "learning disabilities" and language learning difficulties or cultural/social concerns?
> 5. How and to what extent can we use the freedom of the cooperative, multilevel, learner-centered classroom to assist students to learn?
> 6. Can certain, discrete techniques and/or software help students to acquire and retain basic literacy with greater success and less frustration than previously?

We knew that we had posed a large question and we hoped to pursue answers in many ways. We hoped to collect several types of data: teacher interviews/surveys, classroom and computer lab observations of students who do not make expected progress, interviews with students, teacher/researcher logs and before/after measurements on the various techniques and software which we try. We also planned on collecting samples of student work throughout the project. This would include examples from students who make expected progress and from those who don't make expected progress to provide a continuum of work and provide for comparison.

After an initial period of gathering and reading materials on learning disabilities, reviewing other projects, and asking for input from REEP teachers, we learned several things which directed the subsequent progress of our action research:

- When we actually began to search the population of our program for students who fit our general criteria of not making "expected progress", there seemed to be only a handful in our program. However each one of this handful turned out be a student we knew and about whom teachers had

spoken together—sharing ideas, opinions, and techniques.

- There is a bewildering amount of information about learning disabilities in children, adults, and, increasingly, ESL adults. There seems to be no easy answers, especially in the arena of ESL, partly because there probably will never be any amount of "learning disabilities" money available for the adult ESL population.
- Methods and strategies which are promising for children appear to be also promising for ESL adults
- Various technologies sound tantalizing for use with adult ESL learners who don't make expected progress. However, without added funding, many new technologies are not affordable. Word-processing is widely available and offers learners some autonomy.
- Interviewing students is a productive way to find out what approaches might be successful. The interviewing process also helps the student to be an equal partner in his/her learning.

Given the above observations, the three of us decided that a "no frills" approach to the action research project was likely to be as productive as any other. We decided on interviewing, one-on-one interactions, even greater than usual sharing with colleagues, and a narrative approach to sharing our experience with other adult ESL practitioners in Virginia.

The three of us have had varying results with the students we've worked with, but each has found at least a small measure of success and gained greater insights into our particular students, other students who have not shown expected progress, and ESL adult students in general. Three individual narratives will give some account of this.

Dorothy's narrative: Over the course of several months, I observed a student, Ismael. Ismael had studied as a refugee for 9 months in our General ESL classes. He was one of the students who never seemed to advance at the same pace as the other students. He had remained at our 100 level (literacy) class for 2 three-month cycles and had just advanced to the 150 level.

My class was an intensive 8 hours a week, 5-week course open free of charge to refugees with low literacy skills. Ismael was in a multi-level class of 6 students. Attendance was very sporadic, as many of the refugees were busy in the afternoons with doctors' appointments, finding housing, and other immediate concerns.

Because of the class size, I was able to give him the attention he needed and to learn more about his personal background and how it applied to the educational challenges he was facing.

Ismael is a 68 year old man from Somalia with no formal education. His oral skills were much higher than his literacy skills. He was a clan leader and successful farmer in Somalia, but he lost everything to the war. During the war, Ismael had been shot 5 times and was victim of a bomb blast. As a result, Ismael suffered traumatic brain injury, and injury to his eyes from shrapnel. He also had trouble walking because his legs had been severely broken. In spite of all this, Ismael attended class every day and demonstrated a great eagerness to learn.

In a large class situation, Ismael had trouble filtering the background noise. He could not focus on one voice. He said it was sometimes like "cars on the road. Too loud." He felt that too many people were distracting. He liked working one-on-one with a teacher, or in small groups. Because of his eye injuries, he was very sensitive to light. He preferred to have the lights low in the room. He also said that he often got headaches reading, writing, and reading from a whiteboard in the classroom. However, reading from the blackboard did not produce this effect.

Often, I had 1 or 2 students in the class, and I was able to take them to the Adult Learning Center, a computer lab then housed at Wilson Adult Center. Ismael enjoyed the intense focus that computer learning provided. In this lab, I was also more able to control the noise and light in the environment to better suit Ismael's personal needs. We used a program called "Eye Relief" with great success. Eye Relief is a word processor with adjustable sizing and screen color. We were able to work with the background and lettering colors until we came up with a combination that was most comfortable for Ismael. I used the Language Experience Approach to

utilize Ismael's oral skills in aid of his reading. I also typed stories from our reading text into Eye Relief which enabled him to read with greater ease and to keep up with his fellow students.

We also used English Express on CD-Rom for vocabulary building. With the program, Ismael would hear a word, see a picture of it, and was able to repeat the word and compare his recording to the computer's and mine.

Ismael studied with me for 3 5-week cycles. During that time we were able to explore many learning alternatives. He was open and willing to try anything new and was never discouraged. The other students looked up to him for inspiration in their studies even though his skills were somewhat lower than theirs. This attitude, combined with a class situation that afforded this exploration, allowed Ismael to continue to make some progress at his own pace.

Lynda's narrative: Kim has studied in our program for at least 7 years. Kim came from Korea a long, but unspecified, time ago. She has two grown sons who live in Korea. She says she had no formal education, and she is probably in her early 60's.

Kim's inability to progress through our program was one of the nagging frustrations which pushed me into this action research. I met Kim after she had spent a year studying at our Adult Learning Center. Kim worked in the kitchen at a local hotel and studied through a workplace grant. I remember when Kim began to study in my literacy class how excited the ALC teachers were that it was time for Kim to move on into class. Kim remains in that class now.

Of course, when I first met Kim I did not see anything unusual. She was shy, uncommunicative, easily confused, and very devoted to the teacher—me. This was a literacy class, and it often takes students time to feel comfortable, to communicate, and to understand classroom culture. It's common for literacy students to show great respect for teachers. I began to take special note of Kim when she showed some signs of emotional stress in class. When I saw that Kim was upset, I tried to help her to communicate. Whether it's actually acknowledged or not, one of the great purposes of an adult ESL class is to give students the words and the venue to express important things.

An incident from class many years ago seems central to the almost unsolvable problems in helping Kim to progress. The class was doing a circle dialogue about feelings. We were learning "feeling" adjectives: happy, sad, angry, tired, etc. "How do you feel?" "I feel happy." The activity was always successful, and the class got a lot of mileage out of angry/hungry. When I taught "angry", I usually demonstrated by banging the chalkboard or kicking a garbage can and students always understood. When the class went around the circle and got to Kim, she said she was angry and she began to cry. Later, I tried to help Kim to express her feelings, a thing I was not sure she did in any language. Kim gave some information about a man in authority making improper advances to her at work. I tried to give Kim language to stop the problem: "No", "Stop it", etc. The class tried to give her ways to solve the problem at work. Maybe Kim solved her problem, or maybe she has the problem even now; she still works in the same kitchen. When I stopped teaching literacy in the evening program, I felt that Kim was making some small headway, yet she remains in that class.

The reasons for Kim's lack of progress seem to be so complex that all the teachers and volunteers who have worked with Kim do not seem to be able to find a key. Age, culture, sex, education, personality, job, family, and relationships to authority figures play some part in Kim's almost dogged lack of progress.

One of the best things that happened to Kim's life in our school was when a wonderful volunteer agreed to work with Kim this year. Steve's respect, patience, kindness, and open-eyed intelligence made the the teachers feel like we finally might get closer to finding a key. Steve conferred with Kim's teacher and with me and he wrote extensive notes:

> **26 Jan 95, Work Session with Kim:** Although this rank order is tentative, it was fairly clear that her visual and verbal skills are somewhat more developed than her writing/analytical skills. Rationale and specifics are given below. Simple conversation starters did not work well. Questions like "How are you?", "What did you do today?", "How was work?" and "How is class?" resulted in one or two word answers. Following her answers to this type question, her

body language indicated an attitude of "Well, now what?"

More complex questions elicited longer, more complex responses. The most fruitful question concerned the Korean War. Before I could communicate my question, the term "war" had to be defined. This was done with a couple mimes. She quickly understood mimes of machine guns, aircraft and bombs. . . .

She does not appear to understand the phrases "What does this word mean?" or "What is this?" She also refers to the Korean language as "Korean English." To me, this shows a fundamental misunderstanding of the concept of the words, "English", "Korean" and "language." She claims to know only very little Korean. I could not establish if she was referring to spoken or written Korean.

Recommendations: Exercises and conversations should be oriented toward increasing self confidence.

Some exercises should be vigorous, drawing on her formal disposition. Because vocabulary is a grave challenge, perhaps picture labeling exercises, followed up (next week) with a formal, picture flash-card test, would be beneficial. This would also communicate the need to take responsibility for and interact in language learning.

Draw on verbal skills to increase confidence. Informal conversation on interesting subjects (not necessarily "safe" topics) may help. It may stimulate a desire to learn more vocabulary for better and easier communication.

Rigorous repetition of letters and phonics would add structure to the lesson and, in any case, is probably necessary to help build a stronger base in English.

Final Comments 26 JULY 95: Kim's case was not as successful as [another student Steve worked with for this project]. Our work together was cut short when she decided to leave the school for several months. Although we had made some progress, mostly in practicing conversation, there were no major (or any noticeable) advancements at all. It is unfortunate that because of my absences and her early withdrawal, we were never able to work in conjunction with a native Korean speaker. This would have helped us to at least understand her a little better, I believe. In the end, I still believe that she could not, or would not, accept or understand that learning is not a passive exercise. She just never participated or showed any eagerness to participate. I had hope because she clearly remembered what we had worked on, and especially remembered the few small successes we had. I still believe there is hope. But I only think that progress will come from better understanding of her personality, from consistent work with a native language teacher, and consistent one-on-one work. An assessment from an experienced LD analyst may also be helpful. Because of her good memory, and from the uncertainty imposed by age and cultural differences, I'm not yet convinced that she is LD. Unfortunately, that is all I can say about this case.

Kim and her teachers have had a confusing and, perhaps, ambiguous relationship. At many points we have thought that Kim was making progress, or to be on the verge of making progress, and yet Steve's July, 1995 comments sound a lot like my thoughts in 1989. While I remain somewhat frustrated (and I assume Kim does also) I feel less so than before. Through our action research we have done the following: gathered and read a variety of materials related to "learning disabilities", respectfully addressed the problem by soliciting comments from Kim in formal interviews and in many informal conversations, consulted with colleagues about perspectives and techniques and shared our "Kim stories", arranged for Kim to work with a perceptive, creative, and kind tutor who employed various techniques (from phonics to catharsis), and learned that it is not easy to change a person's life even with many good intentions.

What about Kim's life and education? She works and continues to come to our school where we seem to offer her some benefit. I often recall the benefits Kim's given me: carrying my son on her back at the county fair, a birthday party for me which she organized, and a Christmas decoration

from Nordstrom's which was eminently correct. While we've not help Kim to progress in educational ways as much as we've wished, we've learned more about the complexity of human nature, and we've learned again that education is a two-way street.

Kate's narrative: I'll call the student I worked with for this project Marguerite. Marguerite's story differs from the other cases in that I was working with her not to try to find solutions to current learning problems, but rather to look back on her learning experience in our program to see what helped her progress from a very frustrated reader and writer to the more confident and independent reader and writer she is today.

Several people asked that I observe Marguerite for this project. Some felt strongly that she is "learning disabled", while others suspected that she is not. After having worked with her, I am no closer to making this assessment, nor am I at all clear as to what the benefit would be in her case. I can, however, say that she has made great progress toward her study goals of improving her reading and writing, and I can pinpoint some of the factors that helped her to make that progress.

I'll start by giving some background information about Marguerite. She is now 44 years old. She had been travelling as a nanny for diplomatic families since she was 16 years old. In her native country, she had 4 years of education, and this was interrupted by bouts of serious migraines that kept her out of school for long periods of time. Incidentally, Marguerite doesn't know the cause of these migraines, but says that they have diminished in frequency and severity over time.

Marguerite came to our program in 1989. When she arrived, she had fairly strong oral skills, but her reading and writing lagged behind. She took regular English classes for about 2 years. Her oral ability and a lot of effort in reading and writing helped her to progress from the basic literacy level to a high intermediate level. When she got to this point, however, her limited literacy skills prevented her from progressing to a higher level. At this time it was recommended that she switch from the classes to our program's Adult Learning Center, where she would be able to study independently and concentrate specifically on reading and writing. It was during her time in the learning center that Marguerite first started to display confidence and independence in practicing reading and writing. I asked Marguerite about her difficulties in the classroom and she cited several problems. One, she says, is that other languages in the classroom "confused" her. Noise in general greatly distracts her. "I am always listening when I hear noise," she says. No doubt this sensitivity to noise would pose considerable difficulties with concentration for her in a class of 20-30 students.

Marguerite also told me that she needs a lot of time and reflection to grasp new vocabulary and concepts. She says she tries hard to remember things at school, but they don't make sense a lot of the time, so when she is walking home from school (3 miles distance!), she tries to think them through until, in her words, they "fall in place in my brain." When she gets home she writes and rewrites what she has been working on so she won't lose it. Considering her need for reflection, repetition, reinforcement and order, it is easy to understand even more how a rapidly moving intermediate level class would give her too much input to comfortably handle in one sitting.

When Marguerite switched to independent study in the learning center, she wrote as her study goal that she wanted "to improve my read and write to have better futer." She usually worked one on one with a volunteer tutor or teacher, her preferred method of instruction. She worked on a wide variety of skill areas, but the emphasis was always on reading and writing. She felt comfortable with the direct, immediate feedback and explanations from her tutors, and from the computers. And she enjoyed the peaceful environment that allowed her to concentrate.

Over time in the learning center, Marguerite has achieved several personal goals. She has written letters to her friends and relations overseas in English, opened a checking account, and written stories and poems about her homeland. She has made her own dictionary of new words in which she writes down definitions and recopies the words for spelling practice. She has kept a dialogue journal with one of the teachers and a log of stories that she has read. Recently, with a volunteer's help she was able to write an essay about herself for an application to a

nanny placement service. Soon she will be moving to Australia, and she is bravely promising to write letters to all of her friends from the learning center.

Marguerite still needs assistance and direction in reading and writing, but in the learning center she has become much more comfortable and independent in practicing reading and writing. Recently she completed a new-self-evaluation for the learning center, and this is how she described herself:

> I've come a long way through the darkness to the light. I'll practice more often reading. I'll won't give up what I've learned with others.

Marguerite's progress has required a lot of teacher assistance and monitoring. Our program is very lucky to have the option of the independent study lab and to have teachers and volunteers to staff it. These factors were only partly responsible for her success, however. Perhaps more important were Marguerite's motivation to learn and her disciplined approach to her studies.

These narratives give a fair representation of the challenges, techniques, and outcomes we've experienced while working with students who don't make expected progress at REEP. There were no "easy answers", but some encouraging glimmers. The three of us found that quiet and focused one-on-one interactions in the lab or with a volunteer seemed to be more comfortable and productive for the students than the classroom. Physical and/or emotional concerns (in some cases from an unspecified time in the past) may play a role in the lack of progress. Through interviews and informal conversations most of the students we worked with were able to give helpful insights and advice about how they could learn best. Through this project the teachers of REEP, who have always shared challenges, techniques, and stories with one another began to do so more formally, by note and by sharing student work. A major question which drove this project was "how and to what extent can we use the freedom of cooperative, multilevel, learner-centered classroom to assist students to learn?" We found that this environment allowed our students to express their needs for different ways and places to learn, and we were able to try to help them.

Advice:

Don't wait until you understand "learning disabilities" before you start working with students. Get started and learn as you go.

- Three quick sources to get you started are: **ERIC Digest—ESL Instruction for Learning Disabled Adults** (January 1995, EDO-LE-94-08 by Robin Schwarz and Miriam Burt) and the **National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center**, 1875 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C., 20009, (202) 884-8185, and various information from the **TESL-L** and **TESLIT-L** listservs.
- Talk to your colleagues; share your information about students and share your useful techniques.
- There are no magic answers, but there are many small steps. Action research projects are good ways to plan those steps.
- Good luck and share what you learn.

Alternative Assessment: Exploring Affective Benchmarks of Progress

Carol H. Van Duzer, Betty Lynch,
Susan Otero, Jennifer Slater

Overview and Purpose

The impetus for the Alternative Assessment Integrated Research Project grew out of a program-wide inquiry into alternative assessment. In 1993, REEP (Arlington Education and Employment Program) embarked on a 2-year project to research various kinds of alternative assessment tools and processes that can be used across 3 dimensions of language and literacy development:

- Identifying student goals, literacy practices, strategies
- Assessing student performance and skills
- Determining student perceptions and attitudes

The goals of the project were to determine which tools are appropriate for various program contexts (intensive ESL, workplace, drop-in learning lab), when alternative assessment is appropriate given the diversity of learners, instructors, and program constraints, and how these tools/processes may be used to report progress.

A result of the first year of the project was the identification of benchmarks which indicate learners' progress and success. Several of the benchmarks were aspects of becoming an independent learner which are hard to document. These include increased confidence, a willingness to take risks, using resources, organizing study materials, and level of participation both in class and in the community. These aspects of progress also appear to be dependent on other factors such as personality, educational background, stage of culture shock, present living conditions, and work experience both here and in one's native country. A group of four teachers became interested in exploring the development of these affective benchmarks in their classrooms. Through a grant from the Virginia Adult Educators' Research Network, we set out to answer the following questions:

- Are there identifiable stages (a chronology) of development of these benchmarks?
- How do they affect success in meeting learner goals?
- What role do background factors play in predicting success?
- How can these benchmarks be assessed and documented in a consistent manner?
- How can their development be fostered in the adult ESL classroom?

Process

The project was carried out in three phases:

I. Identification of level-appropriate benchmarks and tools to document their development.
II Data collection by classroom teachers on a representative sample of students in each of their classes.
III Analysis of data and reporting of outcomes.

Team meetings were scheduled at regular intervals, usually every 2 weeks, throughout the project to discuss the status of our research and resolve any problems.

Phase I: Identification of benchmarks and tools

The original intent had been to explore a beginning level and an advanced level, but changes in teaching assignments meant that we would be collecting data from two beginning classes (150 level and a 100/200 combination) and one high beginning/low intermediate class (250). Although not allowing a comparison of high and low proficiency levels, these levels solidly represent diverse literacy backgrounds. Generally, an entering 100-level learner has minimal oral and literacy skills, if any. A native English speaker used to dealing with Limited English Proficient (LEP) speakers can rarely communicate with a person at this level. An entering 150 learner can sat-

isfy limited oral and literacy survival needs. A native speaker used to dealing with LEP speakers will have difficulty communicating with a person at this level. A 200 learner can orally satisfy basic survival needs and very routine social demands, but has very limited literacy skills. A 250 learner can satisfy some oral and written survival needs and very routine social demands. Native speakers used to dealing the LEP speakers will occasionally have some difficulty communicating with persons at these two levels.

Benchmarks were then identified for each level, based on teachers' knowledge of that level and data collected during the program's alternative assessment project. For the 100, 150, and 200 level classes, teachers would collect data on Using Resources, Clarification, and Participation. At the 250 level, the teacher would also observe Confidence. For each of these benchmarks, the team developed a definition, rationale, and evidence indicators (See Appendix A). Observation forms were created for the teachers to record the indicators/evidence and the date it was observed (Appendix B). Other tools identified for data collection included teacher journals and learner interviews.

Phase II: Data Collection

Each teacher selected a representative sample of six or seven learners to observe out of a class of 20-30 with the hope that we would end up with data on at least five from each class. Observations began mid-cycle in the 150 evening class at our satellite site and at the beginning of the cycle in the 100/200 and 250 morning classes at our main site. They continued to the end of each cycle. Teachers attempted to record each incidence of evidence of a benchmark on their observation sheet. Anecdotal notes were kept for each student being observed. Tallies were made for individual students as well as for how often a particular strategy was used. The chart in Figure 1 records the total number of times evidence of a benchmark was observed at each level. The numbers in parentheses indicate the breakdown between levels in each of the multilevel classes (for example, #/# = number in 100/number in 150).

Demographic and background data was also collected, including promotion and retention information. The 250 class was also tracked for confidence as indicated by independence (24), participation (39), and leadership (16). Under clarifying, work being checked was another indicator of progress (8) and other resources were also noted (3). In the 100/150 combination class in the morning, checking work was also noted as a benchmark, both checking while in progress (25-23/2) and upon finishing (43-21/22).

Teacher summary reports from the anecdotal records can be found in Appendix C.

Phase III: Analysis and Reporting of Outcomes

Using Resources: We had expected level differences in the type of resources used. Each class showed an overwhelming use of peers and the teacher as resources. As expected, higher literacy proficiency levels (150 and 250) showed greater use of written information (dictionary, text, notebook) than did the 100 and 200 levels. Individual observation grids show an increase in use of written materials at all levels as the cycle progressed.

Clarifying: There was little admission of "I don't understand" and even less of an attempt to repeat information to verify understanding, although this strategy was used more at the 100 level, a finding which we had expected. The use of specific questions to clarify and verify was the preferred strategy observed at each of the levels. This was especially prevalent at the 100/200 and 100/150 morning levels, both taught by the same teacher. The teacher did say that she fosters this in her class. Her students appear to have learned it well.

Participation: Whole class participation was generally high across all levels observed and students appear to work well with students who speak different languages. This may be a reflection of classroom management techniques that utilize small group activities to enable students to learn from each other and work cooperatively on projects. In the two classes where this strategy use appeared to be low, the teacher said that she did not note observations of activities that were specifically designed to elicit such behavior, but only as they happened spontaneously.

As the cycle progressed, use of a variety of strategies tended to increase. This was not reflective in all observation charts, but did come out in anecdotal records.

Analysis of data led to the following answers to the questions posited at the beginning of our research:

FIGURE 1

Chart: Incidence of Strategy Use by Class (number of times observed)

STRATEGY	level 250 1st cycle,am	level 150 1st cycle,pm	level 100/200 1st cycle,am	level 100/150 2nd cycle, am	level 100/150 2nd cycle,pm	
Using Resources: peers	81	33	29 (12/17)	57 (26/31)	52	
teacher	67	29	99 (44/45)	89 (37/52)	34	
dictionary	69	15	0	54 (9/45)	19	
text/notebook	18	6	24 (15/9)	17 (6/11)	7	
Clarifying: not understand	4	2	11 (5/6)	1 (0/1)	8	
repetition	0	3	17 (13/4)	4 (2/2)	1	
specific question	51	15	54 (14/40)	59 (26/33)	25	
verification	5	16	48 (25/23)	55 (27/28)	19	
Participation: general	48	27	95 (45/44)	43 (19/24)	58	
students same language	46	5	1 (0/1)	1 (0/1)	3	
students dif. language	71	24	42 (15/27)	32 (16/16)	16	
group	48	5	78 (35/43)	42 (19/23)	1	

1. Are there identifiable stages (a chronology) of development of these benchmarks?

The only conclusive evidence is that use of written resources does not appear until the learners have developed literacy skills that allow them to access such resources. This was supported by the lack of observable use of the dictionary by the 100 and 200 level students until later in the cycle and the greater use by the most literate level observed (250).

In reflecting why we were unable to identify stages, we felt that we did not always know what strategies students had when they came to us and what they were acquiring in our classes. Learners may not exhibit a strategy in class because they do not have need of it or because they are not yet comfortable with it in the context of learning a new language. However, teachers noted that once they observed a certain strategy, they continued to observe its use. A concrete example is that of dictionary use. Once learners began using dictionaries, more appeared among learners' personal belongings and were consulted more frequently as appropriate. This also represents a strategy that can be taught and encouraged by the classroom teacher.

2. How do these benchmarks affect success in meeting learner goals?

In general, the observation of these benchmarks correlated positively with promotion. The exception, promotion without observed use of many strategies, appeared related to learner background and skill level. A learner may have mastered the language skills to succeed at the next level even though there is little observation of the affective benchmarks in class.

At the lower levels, the teacher noted that the increased use of resources gave the learners confidence and independence. When they made an effort to use their own dictionaries, texts/notebooks, or asked a teacher/peer a question, they understood more of what was required and the number of blank looks decreased. This also increased class participation as they then would turn to help others. The teacher described this reaction in her journal: "By learning a new word or phrase, they can communicate and practice with it, which makes them participate in class. When the students participate in class they seem happier and communicate better. There might be a lot of laughing and hand gestures along with the new words."

3. What role do background factors play in predicting success?

The background factors that were considered in this study were language background, education level, length of time in the United States, work environment, and personality. At the lower levels, the learners' backgrounds seemed very accurate in predicting success. The learners who had jobs, lived in the U.S. for at least 2 years, had an outgoing personality, and were under 35 years old seemed to do better. They seemed to be risk takers and had lots of experiences communicating with English speakers outside of class, experiences which they shared in class. The older learners who had very little formal education took longer to progress, sometimes repeating an instructional level two and three times.

Although education and language played some role in predicating success at the higher level, other factors such as personality, length of time in the U.S., and work environment seemed to weigh heavily. Notations in the teacher's journal indicate some surprises: "I predicted success for some individuals based on my initial information about their education. This did not come to fruition because of their personality. Others with outgoing personalities or who had to use English to communicate on the job or in other environments, but were not as highly educated, needed to learn the language. This was a strong factor for them. Yet it's hard to generalize. Everyone was different."

4. How can these benchmarks be assessed and documented in a consistent manner?

The teachers felt that observing these benchmarks in just a portion of their classes actually made them aware of benchmark development and use in the rest of the class as well. However, they felt that even recording observations for a handful of learners using the grid we had devised was time-consuming and cumbersome. The anecdotal records were helpful and perhaps could be consistently summarized on the progress report currently in use in our program at the initial, mid, and final reporting periods. This question

needs further exploration. One of the teachers would like to experiment with having the learners themselves keep track of evidence of the benchmarks.

The value of recording these benchmarks is not to be disputed. Another teacher noted: "Seeing on paper a student's improved use of resources and increased participation bolstered my sense that he or she was improving in language skills and learning how to learn. Our method of collection gave me something concrete to focus on with regard to classroom behaviors and their change over time."

5. How can the development of these benchmarks be fostered in the adult ESL classroom?

At the lower levels, teachers noticed that certain types of communicative activities seemed to produce benchmark evidence. Activities such as information gap, interview grids, and line dialogues helped develop confidence. These activities require learner participation without the learner being put on the spot. Everyone is doing the activity at the same time so no one stands out, minimizing the potential of being embarrassed as one attempts to communicate.

Attempts to correlate lesson plan activities with the observaton record did not yield consistent data. One of the teachers was particularly frustrated that nights of very high or very low student activity, as indicated by the observation grid, consisted of the same materials and types of activities. She concluded that either the types of exercises do not reliably produce observable benchmark evidence or that the sample size of 5 or 6 students was too small to get accurate results. One student who was having a particularly energetic or quiet night could affect the observation tallies.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As the participating teachers reflected on their experience tracking affective benchmarks, they felt that these benchmarks are, indeed, indicators of learner progress and do play a role in learner assessment. Being able to track them in a consistent and concrete manner enabled the teacher to support promotion/retention decisions when language proficiency level alone was not sufficient. Including them in individual learner profiles presents a more complete picture of learner capabilities to solve communication problems outside the classroom.

We worked as a team to develop benchmark definitions and indicators of development/use. We discussed ways to document our data, devised the grid, and agreed to use journals. We decided to note activities that seemed to produce evidence. We met periodically to discuss how we felt things were going and resolve any problems. However, our effort at tracking the affective benchmarks was not without its flaws. Despite all our communication and discussion of procedure, we found that one of us was not recording observations during activities designed explicitly to elicit such behaviors, but was noting only the spontaneous incidences of evidence. This made the tracking seem overwhelming at times. We realized that we had set an enourmous task before us and perhaps would have had more conclusive results if we had limited our inquiry.

We feel that the issue of affective benchmarks merits continued study because of the role these benchmarks play in assessing learner progress. We suggest that future projects look into the following:

- Explore ways to consistently capture evidence of these benchmarks. Teacher logs, modified observation sheets, and the use of anecdotal records merit additional inquiry.
- Develop ways for the learners to assess themselves on the development of these benchmarks in order to facilitate the development of lifelong learning strategies.
- Devise avenues for teachers to share information about the development of affective benchmarks among their students—both within programs and across programs. The project teachers found that consistent meeting time focused on one question was a rewarding form of staff development that had direct impact on the way they viewed their students and made them better teachers and assessors of learner progress.

As is often the case in action research projects, this particular inquiry answered some of the questions with which we began and raised others. The teachers involved have committed themselves to ongoing inquiry into the role of affective benchmarks as indicators of learner progress and how they can best be documented as they move into their next instructional cycle.

Appendix A
Affective Benchmarks: REEP Teachers' Research Network Project

Benchmark:
Using Resources

Definition:
Using resources means that a learner obtains help or information from other people or written materials, inside or outside of the classroom. The help/ information may be in the learner's own language or in the language of instruction.

Rationale:
Using resources demonstrates that a learner is taking an active role in his/ her own learning process. In order to be an effective learner and to solve problems, a person frequently needs to reach beyond one's own self for help or knowledge and to develop organization skills that will assist one in recalling information or processes that apply to the situation.

Evidence:
- asks peers for help in native language.
- asks peers for help in English.
- asks teacher for assistance.
- uses a bilingual dictionary, phrasebook, or word list.
- refers to own notebook or worksheets.
- refers to textbooks.
- accesses community services such as the library, social services, police, recreation.

Benchmark:
Clarifying/Verifying Information and Instructions

Definition:
Clarifying and verifying means that a learner indicates a lack of understanding or needs to make certain the information or instructions have been understood.

Rationale:
Clarifying and verifying demonstrates that a learner is using language as a resource in the learning process. Learning will be impeded if a person does not understand the information or instructions being conveyed and communication may break down. In our culture, the person conveying the information expects the listener to ask for repetition or clarification of things not clearly heard or understood.

Evidence:
- asks for repetition.
- says, "I don't understand" or equivalent.
- repeats information/ instructions with question tone.
- repeats information/ instructions exactly as conveyed.
- rewords information/ instructions.
- asks, "Do you mean. . .?" or equivalent.
- asks specific questions about what is not understood.

Benchmark:
Level of Participation

Definition:
Level of participation is concerned with how willingly and actively a learner participates in activities both inside and outside the classroom.

Rationale:
Active and willing participation is an indication of taking responsibility for one's own learning. As knowledge and confidence increase, participation should increase as well.

Evidence:
- asks questions.
- responds to questions.
- responds to directions.
- participates in group activities.
- works in groups with same-language speakers.
- works in groups with different-language speakers.
- completes class work.
- completes homework.

Appendix A
continued

Benchmark:
Confidence

Definition:
Confidence is concerned with how willing the learner is to take risks by using language in the learning environment

Rationale:
It is important to be comfortable with the language and learning environment and to be willing to use the language, including taking risks. Participation should increase as the learner becomes more confident.

Evidence:
- works independently.
- asks for/initiates new tasks for self.
- participates in class.
- participates in groups.
- volunteers.
- directs others.
- serves as resource person for classmates, tutors, helps classmates.

Appendix B
Sample Observation Form

STUDENT NAME LEVEL:

Using Resources										
peers										
teacher										
dictionary										
text/notebook										
Clarifying										
no understand										
repetition										
specific Q										
verification										
Participation										
general										
Ss same lang.										
Ss dif. lang.										
group										
Confidence										
independence										
participation										
leadership										

Appendix C
Anecdotal Records

100/200 Class January - March 1995

I observed 4 students from 100 and 4 from 200. I chose students from different countries, different ages and different languages. There are 2 Vietnamese, 1 Eritrean, 1 Mexican, 2 El Salvadorean, and 1 Bolivian Indian.

I found there were a couple of problems with this project. At first, it was very difficult to observe 8 students all at once. I was distracted at times from teaching because I wanted to tally their responses as soon as they made them. Since I had a multilevel class I needed to have volunteers to help the lower level students (100). Therefore I had to rely on my volunteers to observe some of the behaviors.

In spite of these problems, I managed to learn a few things. First of all, I learned that there were minor changes in the grids. Some students had excellent skills in using resources from the beginning and continued throughout the cycle. Other students had gradually increased their skills in using resources.

Secondly, I realized that one of the criteria I used to promote or retain students is their ability in using resources. For example, I felt Ismael's literacy skills were poor but he could ask the right questions to learn and improve his reading and writing.

"B" (1) is a single mother from Mexico. She came to the US 6 years ago. She has had only 3 years of education in her country. This is her first time studying English. She works as a shampoo girl in a beauty salon.

B is a quiet and helpful student. She helps "L" and tries to communicate with her while the others don't even bother. She lacks confidence in her own abilities to understand English. She is afraid to take chances or take a reasonable guess. She has poor literacy skills but knows the basics and can sound out the words.

In the beginning she relied on the teacher for a lot of help and sat at her desk trying to figure out what to do. She asked to be included in a pull-out group for lower level students and students who were working on reading and writing. At first, I was reluctant because I thought it might be too easy for her. Now I realize it was the best for her because she blossomed. Her skills at using resources were average but as time progressed she has shown increased confidence and increased number of checks on the grids.

However, I will retain B because of her literacy skills and her lack of confidence in working with large groups and in unfamiliar surroundings. I feel that she would benefit by repeating the class a second time.

"M" is a 29 year old single mother with a grade school education. She works in a restaurant as a salad person at night. She has been in the US for 10 years and learned English on her own.

M is a quiet, shy, but independent student. In the beginning, she was reluctant to ask for help from peers or me. She always seemed to be waiting for someone else to ask the question. She didn't like to be the focus of attention. However, she would not hesitate to ask me questions when I came to her or if I was standing near her. Since she has been in the US for 10 years, she has very good listening and speaking skills and is very adept in using people as resources. Her literacy skills are poor, which may explain the lack of skills in using dictionaries or referring to her notes.

By the end of class, she has shown marked improvement. She has become friends with a young Vietnamese woman and an older Pakistani woman who are much better in reading and writing. She relies on them for help in most reading and writing assignments. She'll still only ask me most questions privately. However, if she really doesn't understand the assignment given she will now ask out loud in class and refers to her notes more than before.

M will be promoted to the next level.

"T" is a 46 year old single mother and housekeeper from Bolivia. She has 0 formal education and speaks 3 languages - Imara, Portuguese, and Spanish. She is on her second cycle of English.

T is a friendly, easy going, and confident person. She has displayed excellent skills in using resources from the beginning. If she couldn't express herself in English, she would demonstrate it facially or physically. She has shown me many

handouts that we worked on in class to check for errors or approval. She mostly relied on the teacher and her notebook but had no qualms about eliciting help from her peers.

I had T retested and she will be promoted to the next level.

"B" is a middle aged woman from Vietnam. She has had only 3 years of education in her country. She studied with the REEP program for 3 cycles in the same class. She came to the US 4 1/2 years ago with 3 children and 2 are Amerasians that I know of. She is a survivor.

She is a quiet, serious and a confident person. She also has a poker face. It's difficult to read how she feels and what's on her mind. She is a proud person and does not ask for help unless I am nearby and yet she is not afraid to ask for help if necessary. Her daughter who is in the class senses this and will get up in the middle of class and help her. I was fooled by her exterior appearance and behavior and assumed that she knew more than she did.

I believe that she has good skills at using resources but can not read and write very well. I will retain B.

"I" is a young, single Central American man. He came to the US at the age of 14 with his older brother who was 21. He went to high school for a short time but dropped out to help support his family. Now that he is 22 years old and has some money, he realizes he has to learn more English to get a job.

I is outgoing and confident. He has mastered the skills of clarifying. He asks questions as a native speaker would. A lot of the SS and myself use him as an interpreter. However, he rarely uses a dictionary as a resource. This may be due to his poor literacy skills.

I promoted I to the next level because I know he will be able to continue improving his literacy skills by asking the right questions if he doesn't understand something.

"L" is a 26 year old Amerasian who has been in the US for 4 1/2 years. She has had only 3 years of education in her country. She studied English for 9 months when she first arrived as a refugee.

L has a similar profile to I. She is outgoing and at times gregarious. She has good speaking and listening skills but poor reading and writing. From the beginning she has used the teacher, peers and her notebook/text as a resource. However, her questions are not as refined as I's. I believe she had to learn these skills to help her mother in an English speaking environment. In the beginning, she would shout out something in Vietnamese from time to time. As first, I thought she was conversing with her mother but she was only translating. Finally, I asked her to stop speaking in Vietnamese and she told me her mother didn't understand.

I will promote L to the next level because of her improved reading and writing ability and her excellent skills in using resources.

"L" is a young newly married Eritrean woman with a few years of education. She has only been in the US for 9 months. The only time she speaks English is in the classroom. I think she is homebound while her husband works as a taxi driver.

L is a very shy and quiet student who came to class with no English abilities. She didn't understand what went on in the class around her. There was another Eritrean woman student in the class that she could've asked for help but never did. I usually initiated the help for her in order to communicate to her the goings on. In the first cycle, she sat in silence and watched the class in a world of her own.

By the second class, she seemed to know the procedures and what was expected of her. She still didn't know a whole lot of English but she showed signs of "life" and recognition. She is now more able to communicate whether she understands something by nodding or smiling rather than just a blank stare as before. She actually handed in a paper for me to check with a bashful smile indicating that she wasn't sure if it was correct. She has occasionally showed a need for verification by saying "yes teacher?" and "don't know teacher" when she didn't understand. I can see the signs of slow progress but if you looked on her progress report, it would not be indicated. Also all the volunteers who have worked with her have made comments about not showing signs of progress whatsoever.

Even though L has shown progress it is not reflected in her progress report. She will be retained.

100 Level January - June 1995

In the second cycle, L has transformed dramatically. She has shown more confidence and capability by eliciting help from T, volunteers, and her peers. In the past she did not participate, interact, or show an understanding of the activities as much. She makes an attempt at all activities presented in class. She will hand in papers for me to check (i.e., dictation). She is not afraid to shout out answers to questions and is correct about 40% of the time. She is borderline 100/150 and when asked which level she would like to be in the next cycle, she confidently chose 150. She will most likely be in 150 for more than one cycle, but she is ready to be challenged.

B1 has shown an increase in her use of resources from last cycle. She is the class leader for her little group. She helps everyone in her group if they don't understand and will come and ask questions for the group. In the last cycle she spoke more Spanish and chose to sit with Spanish speakers. She was nervous, unsure of herself, and asked to be changed to a lower level. This time she sits with B, L, and a Vietnamese student who are non-Spanish speakers. She seems relaxed and has a lot of fun learning in this second cycle. When asked which level she wanted for next cycle, she chose 150 without hesitation.

B's use of resources showed a decrease in asking help from the teacher, but she began to use her text/notebook. In this cycle, she seemed to regress. It is not known if this regression is due to a larger class or the absence of her daughter, but she seemed unsure and did not ask for help or participate as much as in last cycle. She looked lost in class a lot of the time, but when asked she said she understood. She produced less in written exercises. She would be at least half finished in the last cycle when others had completed theirs, but this cycle, she would only have two or three completed sentences. It appears that she didn't understand the exercises. She was asked what cycle she would like and she co\hose to stay in 100 again.

150 Level March - May 1995

"T" is a vivacious, outgoing, friendly young woman from Bolivia. She is very mature. Even though she is 22 she has had a wide variety of jobs in her country. She is married and stays at home taking care of her five-year old son. She has been in the US for six months.

T displayed excellent skills at using resources from the beginning. She asked a variety of questions during and after class for herself and her peers. She is the class interpreter. She learns rapidly and applies what she learns. She was always prepared in class (i.e., studied for dictation and did the homework). She highlighted every new word she looked up in her dictionary and categorized new words learned in her notebook. She has excellent study skills. She exudes confidence. She volunteered for all activities and followed through with all assignments. T will be promoted to 250.

"A" is a moderately outgoing 18 year old woman from El Salvador. She worked as a real estate agent for six months in El Salvador. She has had 13 years of education in her country. She, her sister, and brother came to live with her parents in the US six months ago.

A showed excellent skills at using resources. She also demonstrated a lot of confidence. She asked a lot of questions in class and liked to participate in all activities. She used her dictionary almost daily. She is an independent learner but she always wanted to have her work checked regularly. She asked help from peers occasionally. A will be promoted to 250.

"F" is an educated, retired woman from France. She quit her secretarial job to raise five children. She and her husband are visiting their son and his family. She has been in the US for six months and will return to France in July.

F's use of resources was best demonstrated in her use of a dictionary, peers, and an occasional use of text/notebook. She participated in all activities and was a wonderful teacher for whomever was paired with her. She was happy to work with all types of students. She helped everyone in class. She understood 90% of the activities in class and if she didn't, she relied on her dictionary. She didn't actively seek help from the

teacher but if the teacher asked then she would. She did her homework and studied for dictation on a regular basis. F will be promoted to 250.

150 Level January - February 1995

I began observing these students at mid-cycle. I chose to observe these particular students because, while each had started the cycle rather hesitantly, some were picking up speed and others seemed not to be gaining much momentum at all. I wanted to see if analysis of their classroom behavior reflected my general impressions.

I tried to select students from a variety of age groups, language, and educational levels. Some had tested into 150 and were spending their first cycle of English study in my class; some were repeating from my 100/150 class the previous cycle; and some had been promoted from 100 after one or many cycles. Finally, I chose students with good attendance records. In this last selection criterion I was not lucky, since two of the chosen students did not return after Christmas break. Of the remaining five, one went to California for three weeks on a church sabbatical, and one broke her leg mid-January and did not return to class. Thus, of the seven students I originally chose, I was able to follow the progress of only five, and only three over the whole cycle.

"Gi" is a young, single Central American woman with a grade school education. She works during the day in a Spanish-speaking environment. She had completed a cycle in 100 before being promoted to my class.

Gi began class in November as a very quiet student who did not appear to understand much of what went on in class and who displayed very few skills at using resources. After being given an assignment, she mostly sat and waited for me to come around to her, then indicated with a shrug and "No entiendo, teacher" that she had no idea how to proceed.

By the middle point of the cycle, Gi was a very different student, and the changes accelerated as class went on. She began to bring a calculator-type dictionary and used it nearly every class. She became proficient in using me and her classmates as resources, so that she tackled assignments with gusto. She also became something of a class leader, helping other students and once writing the daily greeting and news report on the board before I got there. Her classroom behavior score for the second half of the cycle was 3.85.

I had Gi retested and was able to promote her to 200.

"Mo" is a 65-year old Somali man with virtually no formal education. He is retired and spends the day in a Somali-speaking environment. He was a well-to-do tribal leader in Somalia. He speaks and understands some Italian. He had been in 150 the preceding cycle, and four cycles of 100 before that.

Mo is an outgoing and confident person. Despite his literacy problems and slowness in picking up English, he is relaxed, eager to learn, willing to keep trying, and patient with himself. He is not afraid to use English to converse with students of other language backgrounds.

At the beginning of this class, Mo tended to proceed with an assignment he did not understand, usually incorrectly, until I came by to set him right. By mid-cycle, he was more and more using me and his classmates as resources to make sure he was on the right track. He found a compatible Spanish-speaking student and would move to sit by him for assignments that taxed his literacy skills. Although he continued to rely on his independent command of English to complete assignments, he worked with other students to understand how to proceed.

Mo's classroom behavior score for this second half of a cycle was 2.58. He has made and continues to make impressive progress, but I retained him in 150 because neither his literacy skills nor his command of spoken English were enough for a higher level.

"Ma" is a middle-aged Somali woman with some primary education. She stays at home during the day with her family. Some of her children and her husband speak, read, and write English quite well. She had completed one cycle in 100 before coming to my class.

Ma began the class as a quietly confident student. Even though she had fewer peer resources to rely on (since the other Somali speakers in class generally understood less than she did), she never seemed helpless in class. She was good at using her text and notebook and contextual clues to figure out an assignment.

By mid-cycle, Ma was increasingly using me and other students as resources. She would ask me specific questions and confer in English with Spanish-speaking students. She participated in class conversations more, while remaining basically a quiet student. She liked to come to the board to write her answers when volunteers were requested.

Ma had a very high classroom behavior score of 4.5. Even though she broke her leg and missed the last three weeks of class, I promoted Ma to 250 because I could see she had the language and learning skills necessary to manage at that level.

"Se" is a young, single Central American man with a high school education. He works in a partially English-speaking environment. He had completed a cycle in 100 before coming to me.

Se has a friendly, outgoing personality, but started class very unsure of his abilities in English. He paid attention but did not volunteer answers or participate in conversations much. He carried on a lot of social banter in Spanish, and seemed to be a leader in that group, but was nervous about interacting with me.

During the second half of the cycle, Se was a different student. He began to bring a dictionary to class and used it to answer his and other students' questions. His listening skills blossomed, and he took it upon himself to translate my oral instructions for other students. He became very confident of his ability to understand and complete an assignment, and started using me as a resource not so much to help him understand as to verify his understanding and then go back to his group to help others.

Se had a classroom behavior score of 4.08 for the second half of the cycle. Because of the great increase in all his English skills, as well as his demonstrated learning skills, I was happy to promote him to 250.

"N" is a young Central American woman with at least a grade school education. I believe she tested directly into my 150 class.

N has a quiet personality. She began the class very unsure of her abilities and likely to do nothing with an assignment, until directly approached by the teacher. She rarely volunteered, and participated very little even when the class work required it. However, when she got something figured out, she seemed very pleased. I kept waiting for that spark to catch fire, but it never did. Unlike her friend, G, who began class with similar classroom behavior, N never became an active student. Instead, she seemed more and more discouraged about her ability to learn, especially after returning from a three-week absence.

N had a low classroom behavior score of 1.20. I retained her in 150.

100-150 Level February - May 1995

I observed these students over the course of an entire three month cycle, although I didn't choose them as research subjects or start collecting data on them until several weeks into the cycle. It took that long to sort out student transfers into and out of the class, and to get to know the students well enough. I chose seven students for observation. Only one student, Mo, was continuing from my previous class. Three students were new to the program (G, Al, and Ab) and three had one or two prior cycles at 100 or 150 (M, Ro, and Re). I tried to select students from a variety of ages, languages, and educational levels.

My previous 100/150 class, although nominally the same level, was very different, both in general language level and in tenor, from this class. The previous cycle my class was one of three beginning-level classes. Sandwiched between a 100 class and a 150 class, I had non-literacy 100s and lower-scoring or first-time 150s. In contrast, this class was the entire beginning level; we had everyone from literacy students to well-educated, high-scoring 150s. It was a less cohesive, quieter, and much less active class.

The differences between these two classes are reflected in the "classroom behavior" scores that emerged from the data. To obtain these scores, I counted the number of checks for each student over the whole observation period and divided that total by the number of days the student attended class. The resulting number shows the average "activity level" of each student with regard to using resources, asking for clarification, and spontaneous participation in class. The scores for my previous class were, from low to high: 1.20, 2.58, 3.85, 4.08, 4.50. The scores for this class: 0.66, 1.26, 1.60, 1.90, 2.65, 2.80, 3.00. The average for the first class was 3.24; for this one, 1.98.

There was, however, a significant increase in scores over the course of the term. The average range of nightly scores per student during the first half of the cycle was 1.8 to 2.8; during the second half the average range was 2.4 to 3.4. This compares with an average range of 3 to 4 in the second half of the first class, but not as dramatic a difference as the 3.24 to 1.98 comparison implies.

"G" is a young, single Central American man with, I believe, a high school education. He works in a partially English-speaking environment. He tested into 150 in his first cycle, without, I think, previous English classes.

G was extremely quiet in class, growing only slightly more responsive as time went by. He did, however, almost always understand what was going on, finishing assignments with hardly any help from classmates or me. From his ability to undertake and complete assignments, I had to conclude that his listening, reading, and writing skills were pretty good, despite his lack of general participation. When asked to read aloud or participate in dialogues, he always did well.

G's classroom behavior score was an extremely low 0.66, but his demonstrated level of competence in English caused me to promote him to 200. I'm sorry that he did not re-register because, as it turned out, he would now be in my 200/250 class and I would have been able to test my belief that he could handle the work.

"Al" is a young, single Central or South American man. I don't recall his educational level or work environment. He tested into 100, but soon demonstrated literacy and language levels high enough for the 150 assignments and reading group.

Al definitely showed an upswing in participation and resource use over the course of the cycle. In particular, he began to bring and regularly consult a big bilingual dictionary. His classroom behavior checks were confined to three categories: help from peers, help from a dictionary, and general participation. He never asked me for guidance, even when he and his cohorts had not been able to proceed with an assignment. Unfortunately, Al was absent for the last month of class, after a record of excellent attendance. I think he would have shown continued, and perhaps even accelerating, progress had he remained in class.

Al's low classroom behavior score of 1.6 reflects his limited use of resources. I promoted him to 150 because he could handle that level of work, but needed to review the basics.

"Mo" is an older Somali man with no formal education. He was continuing in 150 from the previous cycle, when I also observed his classroom behavior. (See Summaries, Jan - Feb 1995.)

The striking thing about Mo's classroom behavior in the second cycle is that his score dropped from 2.58 in the first cycle to 1.90 in the second. I wrote in my journal that he seemed to miss his friend E, with whom he had often conferred in the first cycle. Even so, he continued to work with other students in English, and used strategies in ten different categories, including some use of dictionary and text.

I retained Mo in 150. Hampered by his basic literacy problems, he has had a hard time making progress despite excellent attendance and hard work over many cycles.

"Mi" is a middle aged married Vietnamese woman with some high school education. She spends the day in a Vietnamese speaking environment. She had been retained in 150 after one cycle in 150 and a previous cycle in 100.

Mi has a quiet and studious classroom demeanor. At mid-cycle, I noted that "although she pays attention, works diligently, and is almost always on track, Mi does not generally look up from her books and papers or participate orally." Her classroom behavior score for this first half of the cycle was 0.83. In the second half, it more than doubled to 1.73, for a cycle average of 1.26. The increase was due to more general participation and more use of peer resources in the second half of the cycle.

I promoted M to 250 because of her demonstrated English proficiency in listening, reading, and writing. She is doing well there this cycle.

"Ro" is a young, unmarried Central American woman. She does not work outside her home. She has a grade school education. She had been promoted to 150 after one cycle in 100.

Ro started out hesitantly but quickly became more confident, and by mid-cycle was a very active student. I noted that, "Ro works hard to solve problems, using peers, dictionaries, and teachers as needed." She accumulated checks in eight dif-

ferent categories. Although her basic skills and background knowledge were less than that of some other students, she managed to complete all assignments.

Ro's active approach to learning is reflected in her classroom behavior score of 2.80. I promoted her to 200, which has been somewhat challenging, but which she is handling.

"Ab" is an unmarried Iraqi man in his mid-twenties. He tested into 150 as a recently arrived refugee. He is well educated (beyond high school, I believe), and had received some English instruction in a refugee camp. He did not work yet. He attended a supplemental afternoon class through EDC.

Ab was a confident and highly active student. He easily used the resources at his disposal. His listening skills improved quickly. He asked pronunciation and grammar questions that showed a sophisticated understanding of language learning. He sometimes had trouble with reading assignments, but with a little help could get back on track. He was outgoing and often engaged in English social conversations with classmates.

Ab's classroom behavior score was 3.00. I promoted him to 250, but he failed to secure a refugee spot in the new cycle, so I cannot report on his further progress.

"Re" is an unmarried South American man in his early twenties. I think that he has a high school education. He works during the day in a partially English-speaking environment. He was promoted to 150 after one cycle in 100.

Re did not come to class with a lot of sophisticated learning strategies, but I watched him find and forge some of his own as he pursued English with dogged determination. I think he was excited to discover that he could learn. I wrote, "Re is always actively involved in class, not hesitant to ask for help from peers or teacher. He's good at solving problems." Not overly gregarious, I think he was so pleased at understanding that he spontaneously moved around the class sometimes, helping other students. As often, he was not among the first to finish, but worked on until he was done.

Re's classroom behavior score was 2.65. I promoted him to 250, but unfortunately he did not re-register. It would have been a pleasure to watch his continued learning.

250 Level January - March 1995

Students were selected to represent a variety of languages, time in US, educational backgrounds, and time with REEP program. A variety of ages wasn't possible, since almost everyone in the class fell in the same range, between 20-35 years old. Of the seven students I began observing, inconsistent attendance was a problem with several. One started job training at the end of January and two stopped coming at the end of class because of job schedule conflicts. Additionally, my own attendance this cycle was not consistent and I think this affected student attendance, especially towards the end of the class. It also meant that I wasn't consistently collecting data, especially the last few weeks of the class.

"COY" arrived in the US from Columbia in November 1994 to get married to an American (who speaks a little Spanish) and missed several classes the first month due to wedding preparations, honeymoon, etc. She missed many classes or came very late the following months as well, due to illness, cold weather, morning sickness, etc.

Since she was highly educated, had recently arrived by her own choice, and appeared to have a good incentive to learn (to communicate at home), I expected her to be a leader in the class. However, she never really took on this role. I think part of it was a natural quietness, but part of it was also her erratic attendance which limited her participation. While she began to exhibit a little more confidence and began to ask for a little more clarification as the cycle progressed, the changes were minimal. She did, however, acquire an electronic dictionary but realized some of its limitations when it didn't give her the translation she expected.

She also did not have the added pressure of trying to find a job or working with Americans while she was in class. My intuition that she was more interested in just talking with classmates from other places than participating in many classroom activities was confirmed during an interview with a Spanish language newspaper where she told the reporter that the REEP classes were a good place for meeting people from other countries. Perhaps what I perceived as a lack of participation was simply disinterest. She seemed to enjoy the learning center where she could work more

independently, selecting activities, vocabulary to study, etc., and where she actually took the initiative to ask for a listening activity because she didn't like the reading she had. She really liked the Speech Master program because she could repeat it for pronunciation (she perceived her pronunciation as bad.)

While she never did engage in the class as I had predicted, she did make enough progress as far as language skills to be promoted to 350. However, I don't think she got as much out of the class as she could have.

In follow-up observations of CQY in the 350 class, she didn't show much confidence or participate too much. While working in a group, she spent time checking her dictionary instead of interacting with her peers and when she listened to her group members, she looked disinterested, not asking any questions. While her group is supposed to be discussing opinions, she doesn't speak until a classmate asks her what she thinks, and becomes group secretary but waits for recap from others to take notes as they dictate to her what to write. With her very sporadic attendance and lack of participation, she will not be able to progress to the following class next cycle.

"AA" was a young man who had recently arrived from a Somali refugee camp in Kenya where he had lived for several years. He worked at Pizza Hut at night and often arrived very tired, but always enthusiastic. He obviously had good interpersonal skills, as he had already learned many Spanish phrases from his co-workers and was eager to try them out on his Spanish-speaking classmates. He did not attend regularly after the first half of the class.

AA entered the class a natural leader. This was not only because he had strong language skills, but because he was outgoing and confident. He demonstrated this confidence by taking the lead before instructions were given for checking papers, assigning students in the group to do certain numbers, eliciting from group members their input, explaining vocabulary or assignments to other students. He was not only a leader though, saying "follow me", but rather a facilitator of his group.

He did not often ask for clarification from me, but rather served as a resource person for his classmates since he usually understood the task at hand.

Unfortunately, I could not track changes in his behaviors over time once he stopped attending regularly. He did express an interest in continuing his studies and was promoted to 350 based on his language skills.

While AA registered for the 350 class, he only attended a few times and I was not able to do any follow-up on him.

"JR" had completed 100 and 200 before coming to the 250 class. He was from El Salvador and was a young man who had been in the US for a couple of years. In El Salvador, he had completed his primary education. He worked in a local Salvadorian restaurant, where he didn't need to speak much English.

Despite JR's relatively limited literacy skills, he was persistent in working on his reading (especially expanding his vocabulary) and writing (especially with his spelling) and he was one of the first students to begin to bring a bilingual dictionary consistently to class. He would sometimes get wrapped up in making notes on his paper, demonstrating his independence as a learner to me. He would tend to ask specific questions when he did not understand as well. He participated in general, but he also stopped attending regularly after the first half of class. If he returns, I would recommend retesting him to see if his oral skills are high enough for the 300 class where he could focus on literacy skills development.

"EF" was a young lady from Bolivia who had been in the US over a year. She had taken 150 and was repeating 250. She was not working at the beginning of the class, but later got a job as a cashier at a drug store and needed English at work.

Although she was a quiet person, I expected her to be active in the class since it was her second time at the level. From the beginning, however, I noted what I perceived as a lack of confidence and wondered what she did when she didn't understand a task. She did begin to ask for a little more help at mid-cycle, after I told her she needed to ask for it when she didn't understand, and began to use me as a resource occasionally, instead of just asking one of her classmates in Spanish. More often than not, she would just work on a task, whether she understood what she was doing or not. EF did often participate with her small group (of mainly Spanish speaking females),

and seemed to participate more in general as the class size shrank. Additionally, she was one of the few students who demonstrated as uncharacteristic zeal during activities such as problem solving. She participated much more actively than usual when we did problem solving type activities and also during our jobs unit, since she was actively looking for a job.

EF attended class regularly, and she was promoted to 350 at the end of the cycle. I expected her to make more gains in language skills as well as in asking for clarification and demonstrating confidence than she did.

In her 350 class, EF continued to be weak in clarifying and demonstrating confidence. She continued to show a preference for working with Spanish speakers and when checking work with classmates, or assisting those who had questions, she routinely interacted in Spanish. Her teacher commented to her that she needed to speak more English in class and less Spanish, and she replied that she speaks English at work. However, it is not so evident during classtime. Additionally, she has only attended a few days a week this cycle because of her work schedule.

"FN" was a young woman from Iran who had recently married and moved to the US since her husband, also Iranian, had lived here for a long time (and spoke English very well). This was her first cycle at REEP. She had completed high school in her country and was interested in studying at the university in the future. She did not plan on looking for work anytime in the near future, but rather planned to concentrate on her studies.

At the beginning of the class, she seemed eager to participate, and needed to always speak in English. She worked well with all her classmates. From the start, she asked questions when she didn't understand something; often she had vocabulary questions. After several weeks of class, she began to bring a Farsi-English dictionary and used it appropriately. As the cycle progressed, she began to ask me to check her work to make sure she had done it correctly. She also began to show a little more independence, especially in the ALC where she requested specific programs or asked to change when she didn't like what she was working on.

FN attended class regularly and her language skills progressed throughout the cycle. She was promoted to 350.

In the 350 class, FN's attendance patterns changed and she often only came to class a couple times a week. When conferencing with her teacher, she was told that she participated and contributed a lot when she came to class, but that it had been difficult to document any progress due to her excessive absences.

"EC" had completed 150 before coming to the 250 class. She was a single young woman from Bolivia who had completed high school before coming to the US. She was working, but didn't need to speak too much English on her job.

EC had a very bubbly personality and worked well with her table from the start, often partnering with Vietnamese speakers. She began to participate more in general and with the whole class as the cycle progressed. It could be that she felt more comfortable, or that the class shrank in size as well. She showed leadership usually only with small groups, leading her groups to review work or helping her table-mates with pronunciation, writing, etc. She often used her classmates or teacher as a resource, as well as her dictionary, and was one of the few students who looked at her text/notebook as a resource as well. EC did very little asking for clarification. Generally, she seemed to understand the task, as she helped her classmates. She did begin to ask questions, mainly vocabulary, or grammar points, and would sometimes ask for me to check her work, often written. However, there was no clear pattern.

EC always attended class and since she was an active participant, her language skills improved a lot over the cycle. She was promoted to 350 at the end of the cycle.

In the 350 class, EC became the natural leader and she definitely exhibited growth in affective areas over the period of time she was observed beginning in January. She was always the self-appointed group leader with group tasks, moving the group along in the tasks, clarifying the task to group members, assigning tasks within the group, and summarizing group work. She would check the work of the secretary to ensure that the important group ideas were written down. She also displayed a lot of confidence when she asserted herself.

Individual Acculturation and Language Learning

Vesna Dovis

The Eastern Shore of Virginia is a 79-mile long peninsula situated east of the Chesapeake Bay, west of the Atlantic Ocean, having a northern border with Maryland and connected in the south with Tidewater Virginia by a 17-mile long bridge-tunnel which costs $20 round trip. The Eastern Shore is divided into two counties, Northampton and Accomack, with a total population of 44,000. The main industries of the Eastern Shore are poultry, farming, fishing, and tourism. Agencies and institutions providing services are a major source of employment.

The population of the area is increased in the summer months by thousands of farmworkers. Many of the farmworkers are of Mexican and Central American origin and speak little or no English. More and more of these farmworkers stay to live in the area each year, finding more stable work in the local poultry plants and other industries. This is, with very few exceptions, the ESL student population at the Eastern Shore Community College.

The Research Project

What types and degrees of acculturation are found in ESL learners? How is individual acculturation affecting language learning and class performance? To find answers to these questions, I made observations in class and started class discussions on acculturation topics. I also used written questionnaires and had individual, private conversations with learners before and after classes, at homes, at the clinic where I work, at stores and restaurants, and over the phone, long distance, with some students that have moved to other places. I also draw heavily on my own experience as a learner of languages: German first, Spanish second, English third, French fourth, Italian fifth; on my adapting to life in the U.S. for the past 25 years, on the experience of teaching ESL and Spanish for the past 7 years, and of translating and serving as a communication bridge in the local courts, jails, schools, hospital, Health Depts., clinics, private doctors, social services, mental health and other agencies.

Of 25 ESL learners interviewed in 1996, 12 are of Mexican origin, 3 from Guatemala, 2 from Nicaragua, 2 from Columbia, 1 from Argentina, 1 from Poland, 1 from Puerto Rico and 3 from Haiti.

Seventeen of these students are men; eight are women. One is under 20 years of age, nine are between 20 and 25, five are between 26 and 30, three between 31 and 40, seven between 41 and 50; none are over 50.

Five of the people interviewed have lived in the U.S. for less than 2 years; seven for less than 5, two for less than 10, five between 10 and 15 years, and one for more than 20 years.

Seven ESL learners have gone to school (other than ESL class) for 12 or more years, three for 7 to 11 years, twelve for 4 to 6 years, and three for 3 or less years.

Two of the learners that came to class for 3 years (Fall 91 to Spring 93) had to go back to Mexico for visa renewals; three came in Spring 96; four in Fall 95 and Spring 96. Three came from Fall 90 to Spring 93; two from Fall 94 to Spring 95; they then had to move away. Two have come regularly to class since Fall 93; seven have come regularly since Summer 94; one has come occasionally since Fall 90; and one since Fall 96.

Nine make a living doing farmwork, nine work in chicken-processing plants, four work in restaurants, two do construction work, and one other does manual work.

Fifteen live with other people of their same country who speak no English, five are married to or living with a partner who speaks English. Five live

with children who speak English, but no adults who speak English.

The things that are missed the most of the country of origin are: family, friends, warm weather, food, and music. The reasons for leaving the country of origin are: lack of employment opportunities, lack of educational opportunities, and lack of security (unstable or corrupt government). The most liked things in their new country are: employment opportunities, educational opportunities, and security (a stable, fair government). The things least-liked in the new country are: isolation from friends and family, isolation caused by language, and cold weather.

Of 25 people who are doing manual work in the U.S., eight had been employed in offices in their country of origin, and three were too young to be employed in their country of origin.

Five out of the 25 had studied English in high school in their country of origin, and all believe that the limitations in their English-speaking abillity is their main acculturation difficulty.

Discussion

There is a widespread feeling of isolation from the established Anglo and African American population. The greatest barrier is social class, followed by language. Indigent newcomers feel their placement in society and humbly accept being patronized, accepting a separation and a difference that is created by assumptions and becomes an artificial acculturation barrier. An upper-class newcomer is readily accepted in professional and other circles and does not allow any derogatory hints; on the contrary, assertiveness sometimes borders with arrogance, and eccentricity is a major appeal—even a poor use of English is considered attractive. Being able to treat others with the same respect that I would like for myself and never taking anything for granted, I find that working class ESL learners are open to absorb, listen, and accept the English language and culture as is. Culturally speaking, things are not what the seem to be. Apparent differences are often skin-deep. Mexico and other countries are vastly influenced by the U.S.

Lifestyles are learned and emulated from American TV, movies, and publications. Being or aspiring to be consumers of the same products consumed in America, from Coke and Levis to computers and cars is perceived everywhere as a goal worthy of personal sacrifice, a goal that may include separation from family, friends, and country.

The needs for survival and education can often only be met in the U.S. To a degree, new immigrants have already adapted to American culture before having been here. The eagerness to adapt is sometimes exaggerated, as when changing religions, family names, and rejecting the Spanish language, all of which is not necessary for acculturation.

Many times new immigrants have the belief that they are vastly different culturally from the Anglo or African Americans who they must communicate with. The African or Anglo Americans have exactly the same perception, that they are confronting a being radically different from themselves. When a reasonably good interpreter is present, these feelings vanish and normal communication is established.

Many times ESL learners are not aware of how much English they know and of how American they already are. Young new immigrants that come from isolated, poor rural settings often do not have a strong vocabulary or a strong understanding of the grammatical structure of their first language and readily absorb, from crew leaders and others who have lived here longer, a form of "Spanglish" that is mostly based on English words made to sound Spanish.

Comparing Structures

In Spanish: *El camiòn està en la granja.*
In English: *The truck is at the farm.*
In Spanglish: *La troca ésta en la farma.*

If Spanish, instead of English, was the dominant language, the Spanglish would be: *The camion is at the granj.* But this does not happen.

In Spanish: *Los caños se congelaron.*
In English: *The pipes froze.*
In Spanglish: *Las pipas se frizaron.*

If Spanish was the dominant language, the Spanglish would be: *The canes congealed.* But this does not happen.

Other examples:

English	Spanish	Spanglish
lunch	almuerzo	lonche

push	empujar	puchar
shot	inyecciòn	chat
influenza	gripe	flu
stress	tensiòn	estrès
chance	posibilidad	chanza
drug-store	farmacia	droguerìa

Some local people that speak only English, or English and Spanglish, are sometimes unaware that there is a standard Spanish, as there is a Standard English, and believe that different "kinds" of Spanish are spoken in different countries or regions, and that this causes communication among Spanish-speakers of diverse origins to be very difficult. For example, when people go to the DMV to apply for a driver's license, they have access to printed materials, driver's manuals, and tests in both Standard Spanish and Standard English. But nothing is printed in Spanglish, and many people have difficulty understanding the Spanish as well as the English vocabularies.

Spanish taught in school is Standard Spanish, but people who live in the U.S. are sometimes not aware of this, as they are in Spanish speaking countries. In regions of Latin-America people speak Native-American languages, but learn Standard Spanish in school. In Spain, different regions speak different languages, but they also learn the standard language at school. The people who do not understand the standard language, such as people living in remote places, unable to go to school, isolated from people who speak the standard language, are well aware that they are NOT speaking Spanish, while people who live in the U.S. are not aware that they are speaking Spanglish rather than Spanish. Here is a sample list of traffic-related vocabulary that shows why it is so difficult to be understood and to understand both English and Spanish:

English	Spanish	Spanglish
wrecker	grúa/remolque	requer
insurance	seguro	aseguranza
brakes	frenos	brecas
bumper	parachoques	bompa
camper	casa rodante	camper
choke	regulador de aire	choc
clutch	embrague	cloche
ditch	cuneta, zanja	diche
dumptruck	camion de volteo	troca de dompe
fender	guardabarros	fender
forklift	montacargas	forclif
freeway	autopista	friuei
gas	gasolina	gas
muffler	silenciador	moffla
parking lot	estacionamiento	parqueadero
pickup truck	camioneta	picup
pump	bomba	pompa
ride	aventon (MEX)	raite
rim	aro	rin
spark plug	bujía	ploga
speedometer	velocímetro	espidómetro
starter	arranque	estárter
switch	interruptor	suich
ticket	citación/infracció	tíquete
trailer	acoplado/remolque	traila
truck	camión	troca/troque
truck driver	camionero	troquero
van	camioneta	ven
windshield	parabrisas	güinchil
windshield wipers	limpiaparabrisas	güaiperes

ESL learners are happy to discover how words that they hear and use are pronounced, spelled and written. Typically, students of foreign languages are bored and burdened by grammatical concepts, but local ESL students have a great love of grammar and structure, as it solves comprehension mysteries. Favorite books are grammar-based, where parts of speech and verb conjunctions are listed. Picture dictionaries are turned down as childish. Learners, without exceptions prefer standard dictionaries. Learning a new word, students often grasp meaning from context, and the question sometimes is not "What does this mean?", but "Is this an adverb? an adjective? a pronoun? a preposition?"

The sounds of English sometimes seem strange; it is not as simple as it looks to turn "troca" into "truck", "pipa" into "pipe", and so on. Often students make notes, not of translations, but of the way things sound to them. They soon become aware of speech variations and they are eager to learn which is the correct one. When this facilitator talks of more than one acceptable and/or understandable way of expressing thoughts, learners become slightly frustrated; they would hope that there would be one way only. For example, if I say: "My friend and I will go shopping", to a Spanish speaking learner this sounds:

"mai frend endai uil gou yoping." But what they have heard is: "Me and my friend gonna go shoppin'" which to them sounds like: "mi en mai fren gonago shopin." For "I bought a car last week" which sounds: "ay bot e car last uik", was heard: "I got a car last week" sounding like: "ay goda ca last uik."

This is how the alphabet sounds to a Spanish-speaking learner:

A ei	B bi	C si	D di	E i
F ef	G yi	H eich	I ay	J yei
K kei	L el	M em	N en	O ou
P pi	Q kiu	R ar	S es	T ti
U iu	V vi	W dabliu		
X ex	Y uay	Z zzi		

Numbers sound as:

One uan	Two tu	Three zri
Four for	Five faiv	Six six
Seven seven	Eight eit	Nine nain
Ten ten	Eleven ileven	Twelve tuelf
Thirteen zertin	Twenty tuenti	Thirty zerdi
Forty fordi	Fifty fifti	Sixty sixti
One hundred uan jandred		

The days of the week are:

Monday Mandei	Tuesday Tusdei
Wednesday Uensdei	Thursday Zersdei
Friday Fraidei	Saturday Saterdei
Sunday Sandei	

The months of the year are:

January Yaniuari	February Februari
March March	April Eipril
May Mei	June Yun
July Yulai	August Ogust
September September	October Octouber
November November	December Disember

"Today" sound like "tudei"; "tomorrow" as "tumoro"; "yesterday" as "iesterdei."

Many Hispanics have strong family ties—as mother and father left behind were very close—but now the only remaining link is the family name of both.

A typical Anglo or African American name is:
John James Smith.

A typical Hispanic name is:
Juan Perez Lopez

Most people who see or hear these names and are Anglo or African American will assume that John is the first name, James is a middle name, and Smith is a last name (possibly the father's). And they would apply the same rule to the Hispanic name: Juan = first name, Perez = middle name, and Lopez = last name (possibly the father's). This assumption, when applied to the Hispanic name, will probably be wrong, because for a Hispanic, typically, Jaun = first name, Perez = last name (father's), Lopez = last name (mother's).

A person named Juan Perez Lopez would think it strange to be called "Mr. Lopez", as it would be for a person named John James Smith to be called "Mr. James." Cultures are patriarchal, and people think that their last name should be the father's last name, not the mother's. So, John James Smith should be called Mr. Smith and Juan Perez Lopez should be called Mr. Perez.

If Juan Perez Lopez marries Maria Gonzalez Gomez, and they have a baby whom they name Nancy, this is what happens with her name:

Juan Perez Lopez + Maria Gonzalez Gomez = Nancy Perez Gonzalez

The grandmother's last name is dropped, but not the mother's (actually, the mother's father).

Sometimes local providers do not understand this very well, and so all business related to personal identity and documentation becomes confusing and often wrong, especially at hospitals where babies are born. At times unassertive new immigrants are told that they must change their names. They don't understand why, and because they don't, self-esteem and a sense of identity are lost.

Since it is not unlawful in the U.S. to have only one first name or/and two last names, people should be allowed to keep the names that they identify with, and to name their babies as they believe is proper. In order to make clear to people not used to this naming system which is the first name and which are last names, a hyphen is needed between last names. For example:

Father: Juan Perez-Lopez
Mother: Maria Gonzalez-Gomez
Baby: Nancy Perez-Gonzalez

In charts or other documents in which last names come first, names should be recorded as:

Father: Perez-Lopez, Juan
Mother: Gonzalez-Gomez, Maria
Baby: Perez-Gonzalez, Nancy

5 de Mayo

This is a popular Mexican holiday, celebrated with beer and parties in American universities, but while interviewing ESL students of Mexican origin about the personal significance and ways to celebrate it, there was no knowledge of it, of the Emperor Mazimilian, of his reign and deposition, or of celebrations in Mexico. Out of ten people questioned, three said that it was Independence Day, but they were only guessing. Independence Day in Mexico is September 16.

Giving Birth

Many people who still speak Spanish, and who are not always aware of how American they have become, have changed concepts from Hispanic concepts to Anglo concepts, without changing the language. For example, the Spanish expression for giving birth is "dar a luz", meaning "give to light." The American expression is "to deliver." ESL learners, when speaking Spanish, never use the expression "dar a luz". Instead, they use "aliviarse", meaning "to be relieved of", which matches "deliverance" much better than it does "give to light." Assimilation is sometimes deeper than what would be needed to adapt. Two cultures, two languages may be used to enrich each other.

Personal Reflections

Sometimes some people mistakenly see new immigrants in a bad light, as taking advantage of public assistance. The most common so-called beneficiaries of public assistance are mothers-to-be, new mothers, and their babies and young children. In reality, many come from places where babies are born at home, with the assistance of a midwife who is free or whose services are very cheap. (There is no English translation for the Spanish word "comadre", the godmother of one's child who may possibly serve as midwife).

Babies are breastfed; cloth diapers are made and washed; baby food is prepared at home; and one goes to the doctor only in case of emergency. New immigrants are forcefully placed in a modern, sophisticated health system that requires enormous expense for each birth and baby. There is no hint that a choice exists, and the pregnant woman with docility submits to what she believes is the American Way.

By being here she is supporting the local economy in a very dramatic way. Hundreds of local jobs, health care agencies, and the hospital are supported by her. Mothers and children receive detailed, excellent medical care, and also lots of plastic diapers, baby formulas, bottles, and countless jars of baby food. They humbly and compliantly accept it all, while at the same time providing hundreds of fine jobs that don't require hard labor outdoors. Mothers provide for much better paid jobs than their own, with benefits, air conditioning, and comfort. From the time babies are a few weeks old, they provide for day-care agency jobs.

The established population not only benefits from the vegetables, fruit, ornamentals, chickens, roads, bridges, and buildings that new immigrants produce with hard labor, the economy also benefits with so many new consumers.

Conclusion

Types of acculturation include: 1) Assimilation, in which individuals lose their original cultural identity; 2) Integration, in which individuals develop a bicultural orientation; 3) Separation, in which individuals resist acculturation; 4) Marginalization, in which individuals give up their original culture while being rejected by the new culture; 5) Transmutation, in which a new culture emerges from the clash of two cultures.

Elements of all these types of acculturation are found in class. Assimilation happens unconsciously; I have yet to meet a learner who will admit wanting to terminate original culture, even when changing names, religion, or/and language.

There is an intuitive, underdeveloped need for Integration in all of us. It is stronger in the women that I have met, because of their homemaking, which

includes cooking their native meals, raising children while longing for the support and help of mothers and other female kin, and wanting to communicate with their American, English speaking children.

As facilitator, Integration is a major goal as cultural aspects of both groups are compatible, similar, or the same, and makes an individual feel comfortable and identified with at least two cultures.

Separation is rare in class. In the past seven years, I have seen it happen only three times. The three individuals happened to be not very open-minded males over 50.

A marginal state of mind is hopefully transitional, and happens as unconsciously as Assimilation. Individuals will have no knowledge of how much identification they have lost with the original culture until they go back to visit the original country.

Transmutation is, at least locally, the strongest type of acculturation. A new cultural entity is generated. Personally, I prefer and encourage Integration, but the process of acculturation in terms of dominant cultural assimilation and native cultural extinction is beyond a facilitator's reach, as it is a process happening not in class but in the community; it is a social, not an individual acculturation.

To answer the question "How is individual acculturation affecting language learning and class performance?", I will again propose Integration as the best state of mind to enable one to accept a new language and a new culture, without sacrificing another, as not only there is no need to sacrifice another, but one will always help the other, and the balance created will enrich not only the individual but all society.

Appendix A

When did you come to the USA?
How old were you when you came to the USA?
Did you come alone, or with family or friends?
Do you like living in the USA?
What do you like about living in the USA?
What don't you like about living in the USA?
Name three things that are better here than in your country.
Name three things that are better in your country.
Are you a man or a woman?
Do you have children?
What kind of work do you do?
What do you like to do?
What would you like to know?

Appendix B

Because of a common origin, thousands of words are Spanish as well as English; the spelling has some variation, and the pronunciation has sometimes a variation that is so strong that the word becomes unrecognizable to a person who speaks only one of the languages.

ESL students believe that learning how to pronounce English is a major need, and they work hard at it. Typically, younger people are very successful, and older people struggle and forget.

The importance of stress, together with pronunciation, is something that many people are unaware of. If a word is pronounced understandably, but the stress is put in the wrong place, the word might not be understood, or it might be misunderstood.

For example, learners new in class pronounce "13" as *ZIRdi* (sounds like "30"); "14" as *FORdi* (sounds like "40"), etc.

Stress needs to be pointed out. For example: thirTEEN; THIRty

In the vocabulary that follows, stress comparison and also pronunciation for Spanish speakers is illustrated.

Write/escribe	pronuncia	Espanol
AIR	ER	AIre
AMERICAN	aMErican	ameriCAno/a
ANIMAL	Animal	aniMAL
AREA	Erea	Area
ART	ART	ARte
ATTENTION	aTENyion	atenCION
BABY	BEIbe	beBE
BAND	BEND	BANda
BANK	BENK	BANco
BASE	BEIS	BAse
BASIC	BEIsic	BAsico/a
BOAT	BOUT	BOto
BOTTLE	BADL	boTElla
CABIN	KAbin	caBIna
CAPITAL	KApital	capiTAL
CAPTAIN	KAPtan	capiTAN
CAR	KAR	CArro
CASE	KEIS	CAso
CAUSE	KOS	CAUsa
CENTER	CENter	CENtro
CHECK	CHEK	CHEque
CITY	CIdi	ciuDAD
CLASS	CLASS	CLAse
CLEAR	KLIAR	CLAro/a
COAST	KOUST	COSta
COLOR	COlor	coLOR
COLUMN	KOlumn	coLUMna
COMMON	KOmon	coMUN
COMMUNITY	koMIUniti	comuniDAD
COMPANY	KOMpani	compaNIA
COMPARE	komPER	compaRAR
COMPLETE	komPLIT	compleTAR
CONSIDER	konSIDER	consideRAR
CONTAIN	konTEIN	conteNER
CONTROL	konTROL	conTROL
COPY	KOpi	COpia / coPIAR
CORRECT	KoRRECT	correGIR / coRRECto
COST	KOST	COSto
COURSE	KORS	CURso
DANCE	DANS	DANza
DECIDE	diSAID	deciDIR
DESCRIBE	disKRAIB	descriBIR
DESERT	DEsert	deSIERto
DIFFERENCE	DIferens	difeRENcia
DIFFERENT	DIferent	difeRENte
DIFFICULT	DIficolt	diFIcil
DIRECTION	diRECyion	direCCION
DISCOVER	disCOver	descuBRIR
DISTANCE	DIStans	disTANcia
DIVIDE	diVAID	diviDER
DOCTOR	DOCtor	docTOR
DOUBLE	DABL	DOble
DURING	DIUring	duRANte
ELECTRIC	eLECtric	eLECtrico
ELECTRICITY	elecTRIciti	electriciDAD
ENERGY	Eneryi	enerGIA
ENGLISH	INgliy	inGLES
EQUAL	Icual	iGUAL
ESPECIALLY	esPEyiali	espeCIAL
EXAMPLE	iXAMpl	eJEMplo
EXCEPT	iXEPT	ecXEPto
EXERCISE	Exersais	ejerCIcio
EXPERIENCE	ixPEriens	expeRIENcia
EXPERIMENT	ixPEriment	experiMENto
EXPLAIN	ixPLEIN	expliCAR
EXPRESS	ixPRES	expreSAR
FAMILY	FAmili	faMIlia
FAMOUS	FEImos	faMOso/a
FIGURE	FIguiur	fiGUra
FINAL	FAInal	fiNAL
FORCE	FORS	FUERza
FRUIT	FRUT	FRUta
FUTURE	FIUtyur	fuTUro
GENERAL	YEneral	geneRAL
GOVERNMENT	GAvernment	goBIERno
GUIDE	GAID	GUIA
HUMAN	JIUman	huMAno/a
IMAGINE	iMAyin	imagiNAR
IDEA	aiDIA	iDEA
IMPORTANT	imPORtant	imporTANte
INCLUDE	inCLUD	inCLUIR
INDUSTRY	INdustri	inDUStria
INFORMATION	inforMEIyon	informaCION
INTEREST	INterest	inteRES
ISLAND	AYland	ISla
JUST	YAST	JUSto
LIQUID	LIcuid	LIquido
LIST	LIST	LISta
LOT	LOT	LOte
MACHINE	maYIN	MAquina

MAP	MEP	MApa
MILE	MAIL	MIlla
MINUTE	MInit	miNUto
MODERN	MOdern	moDERno/a
MOMENT	MOUment	moMEnto
MOUNTAIN	MAUNtein	monTAña
MOVEMENT	MUvment	moviMIENto
MUSIC	MIUsic	MUsica
NATION	NEIyion	naCIONN
NATURAL	NAtyural	natuRAL
NATURE	NEItyur	naturaLEza
NECESSARY	neSEseri	neceSArio/a
NO	NOU	NO
NORTH	NORZ	NORte
NOTE	NOUT	NOta
NOTICE	NOUtis	noTIcia
NUMBER	NAMber	NUmero
OBJECT	OByect	obJEto
OCEAN	OUyan	oCEAno
OFFICE	Ofis	ofiCIna
OPPOSITE	Oposit	oPUESto
ORIGINAL	oRIyinal	origiNAL
OXYGEN	Oxiyen	oXIgeno
PAIR	PER	PAR
PAPER	PEIper	paPEL
PART	PART	PARte
PARTICULAR	parTIquiular	particuLAR
PASS	PASS	paSAR
PAST	PAST	paSAdo
PERSON	PERson	perSOna
PHRASE	FREIS	FRAse
PLAN	PLEN	PLAN
PLANT	PLENT	PLANta
POEM	POem	poEma
POPULAR	Popiular	popuLAR
POPULATION	popiuLEyon	poblaCION
POSITION	poSIyion	posiCION
POSSIBLE	POsibl	poSIble
POWER	PAuer	poDER
PRACTICE	PRACtis	PRACtica
PRESENT	PREsent	preSENte
PROBABLY	PRObabli	probableMENte
PROBLEM	PROblem	proBLEma
PRODUCT	PROduct	proDUCto
PROTECT	proTECT	proteGER
PROVIDE	proVAID	proVEER
PUBLIC	PAblic	PUblico/a
PURPOSE	PERpous	proPOsito

RACE	REIS	RAza
RADIO	REIdio	RAdio
REASON	RIson	raZON
REGION	RIyion	reGION
REGULAR	REguiular	reguLAR
RELIGION	reLIyion	reliGION
REPORT	riPORT	reporTAR
REPRESENT	ipreSENT	represenTAR
RESULT	riSOLT	resulTAdo
RICH	RICH	RIco/a
ROSE	ROUS	ROsa
SCHOOL	SKUL	esCUEla
SCIENCE	SAiens	CIENcia
SECOND	SEcond	seGUNdo
SECTION	SECyion	seCCION
SEPARATE	SEpareit	sepaRAR
SIMILAR	SImilar	simiLAR
SIMPLE	SEMPL	SIMple
SOLID	SOlid	SOlido
SOLUTION	soLUyion	soluCION
SPECIAL	SPEyial	espeCIAL
STATION	STEIyion	estaCION
STUDENT	STIUdent	estuDIANte
STUDY	STAdi	estuDIAR/ esTUdio
SURPRISE	sorPRAIS	sorPREsa
SYMBOL	SIMbol	SIMbolo
SYSTEM	SYStem	sisTEma
TELEPHONE	TElefoun	teLEfono
TELEVISION	teleVIyion	televiSION
TEMPERATURE	TEMperatyur	temperaTUra
TRAIN	TREIN	TREN
TYPE	TAIP	TIpo
UNIT	IUnit	uniDAD
UNITE	iuNAIT	uNIR
USE	IUS	uSAR/Uso
VALUE	VAliu	vaLOR
VARIETY	vaRAIeti	varieDAD
VISIT	VIsit	viSIta
VOICE	VOIS	VOZ

Cyber This and Cyber That: Negotiating Computer Learning

Suzanne Cockley

Introduction

In 1984 the non-traditional, non-profit education program I worked for decided to "go" with computers. On a chilly autumn morning, with fog rising up from the valley below, all of the program employees gathered around the wood stove in the office and Nick, the brother of one of us, patiently led us into the world of PCs. He was an excellent teacher. He explained enough about how a computer "thinks" (binary operations, how it makes choices and understands commands) to help us begin to problem-solve, but didn't present too much to overwhelm us. We each had a new computer to work on and he spent the whole day moving around behind us, helping us play with the word processing program he had loaded the day before, applauding our little victories and tailoring his suggestions to our individual levels of understanding.

Since that day, I've added to my computer repertoire, although many of my co-learners have far surpassed me in the variety of things they now do with a computer and their understanding of how software works. After that first relaxed introduction, I have set out on each new learning project with a mixture of resignation and panic. I am thankful for word processing and I really appreciate the freedom from hand cramps and spelling horrors which it offers. I enjoy writing now and I don't think that would have been true had I never used a computer. Nevertheless, I fight each new addition to my computer learning. "Why change?" I argue. "Isn't this working? What's wrong with the old fashioned way?" Once I am convinced that I really do need to update my skills, the hard work begins. I have found that I do not take naturally to computers. I get very frustrated with manuals and computer people—all of whom appear to speak something other than Standard English. I have not reached the point where I can glide easily from one software program to another. The most pressing, yet most mystifying area of new learning is electronic communication—the Internet. My feelings of panic are highlighted by the fact that many of my colleagues DO take naturally to computers. They even enjoy learning new things. They are enthusiastic about the Internet.

Why are people of similarly reasonable intelligence so different in their acquisition of computer skills? Do some of us just have a better attitude? Are there characteristics among individuals which facilitate computer learning? What other factors are involved? All these questions seemed to take on more importance as it became clear the Adult Education program in Virginia would soon be expecting adult educators to use computers in general and electronic communication in particular to relate to the State office, access Resource Center holdings, communicate with each other, etc. Surely there are people all over the state who, like me, shy away from technology and, if so, this has great significance for staff development providers. How can we help adult educators in Virginia "get up to speed"?

My research question began to take form. How do adult educators learn to use computers. . . . what does the process look like?

Methodology

The Survey: In October 1995, several staff development providers were discussing this issue at a meeting. We were all interested in the state of computer usage in Virginia, although from different perspectives. We decided to survey the adult educators in Virginia about their computer use. Our main question was "Who is using what equipment and for what purposes?" Anthony wanted to identify "power users", individuals who have a lot of experience and knowledge about a variety of computer programs and functions. The Staff

Development Specialist was interested in the need for staff development and what that staff development should look like in order to be useful. As a staff development provider, I wanted to learn more about how people acquire computer skills.

We were constrained somewhat by our budgets and we could not send a mass mailing of our survey. Therefore, we only mailed it to administrators, regional specialists, and lead teachers. I called all of these individuals and urged them to copy and distribute the survey among all their staff members. Everyone was very helpful. Later, we also published the survey in *Progress*, the quarterly state-wide adult education newsletter. A copy of the survey appears in Appendix A.

Our method of distribution made it impossible to determine our rate of return. However, it did make good use of our resources to get many responses. 364 surveys were returned. Through data analysis, I was able to identify power users, average users and almost non-users by examining the computer activities reported.

The Interviews: The survey asked individuals if they would agreed to be interviewed, and in February I questioned many of these people. I arranged to telephone interview 4 power-users, 3 pre-users and 15 average users. Each interview lasted about 30 minutes. In general, I used these interviews to find out how these people learned to use the computer. I asked about classes and workshops, if they used manuals, if their learning had changed any over time (later I also asked if they could identify stages in their learning). I asked if they learned computer skills differently than they learned other things. A detailed list of interview questions appears in Appendix B. The questions served to guide the interviews, but I also pursued related topics as they came up.

In addition to the interviews with computer learners, I also interviewed three computer instructors: one who teaches in a community college, one in a technical center, and one in a private, for-profit "cyber cafe".

Data Analysis: Survey results were collected and tabulated. User expertise was determined by categorizing computer activities with which respondents were comfortable. Respondents who reported using e-mail, searching for information on the Internet, downloading items from the Internet, and using a variety of software programs were considered "power users". Those who were comfortable using computers for word processing and in the classroom and perhaps reading e-mail messages, but who did not download e-mail or do Internet searches were considered average users. Those whose self-reported skills were below this, but who did own a computer and/or have regular access to a computer at work, were considered pre-users.

The telephone interviews, as well as the personal interviews, were recorded with the interviewees permission. Each interviewee was assigned an identification number. The tapes were transcribed and these transcriptions were broken into 11 different response categories. The responses in each category were examined and summarized and themes were extrapolated from the summaries.

I conducted two literature searches. The first search examined information about computer learning and the second literature search investigated stages in literacy development for comparison with computer learning stages.

Findings

Survey Results (Total 364 responses)

Who Responded

186 teachers
18 volunteer tutors
83 administrators/program planners (ABE, ESL and volunteer groups), specialists
60 teachers or tutors with administrative duties
12 aides or office workers
5 other

Access

77% (279) have regular use of a computer at work
72% (261) have a computer at home
7% (24) have a computer at home only.
5% (18) have only occasional access to a computer
2% (8) have no access to a computer

Types of Equipment in Use

73% (265) use a DOS-based computer
16% (60) use a Macintosh computer
12% (45) use an Apple computer
11% (42) use only a non-DOS computer

How Computers are Used

Word Processing

87% (317) use word processing

14% (52) use the computer only for word processing

Instructional purposes

69% (250) use or have used instructional software

4% (14) use a computer only for instructional purposes

Electronic Communication

49% (177) have a modem

31% (112) have an e-mail address

22% (81) have a modem, but do not have an e-mail address

8% (30) have an e-mail address but are not comfortable sending short messages

Self-Reported Expertis

There were 34 power users, all of whom have most, if not all, of the following characteristics:

Regular access to computers at work

Own home computers

Use word processing

Comfortably communicate with e-mail, including up-loading and down-loading documents and messages

Perform information searches on the Internet

There were 9 non-users or pre-users who do have regular access to a computer, either at home or work.

There were 26 people who have no access or only very limited access to a computer either at home or work.

The remaining 295 individuals are average users.

Interview Results

Motivation for Learning Computer Skills

Most respondents said they are motivated to learn new skills if those skills will make them more efficient at work.

Whatever I do to learn on the computer, the most important thing is to be more efficient at work. #250

A smaller number of respondents said that they would learn new skills only if required to at work.

Sue: *What motivates you to learn new technology?*

"Need"

Sue: *Need as related to your job?*

"Yes, my job. Not personal enjoyment; I don't even use an ATM card." #297

Only a few (mainly "power users") reported that they learned new skills out of curiosity or fascination with the technology.

Sometimes when I sit down I'll start doing something and then something else will come up and I'll say "What's this"? I get side tracked and I go off on something else that really isn't very meaningful, but its just sort of intriguing. #339

The great majority of people said that they fear "falling behind" and that this motivates them to keep up-dating their skills.

I don't want to get behind for one thing, I'm a doer. I don't want to be left in the dust when everybody else is taking off with the computer #190

Strategies for Learning New Computer Skills

Almost every respondent - computer learners and computer teachers alike, emphasized the importance of a hands-on approach, with plenty of practice.

That's one thing that I do have strong feelings about....people have to learn by being on the computer. You have to do it. #218

My fist step to learn a new thing would be to actually get on it and look at it with my hands. #297

Many respondents reported that they are too busy at work to learn new skills, even if they are required for work. Therefore, many people practice work-related skills on computers at home.

I don't have enough time at work to really practice what I need to know. #360

[When I need to learn something new for work] I would probably take the software home and work through it. #85

Each computer teacher interviewed stressed the importance of the shortest possible time lapse between a session where a skill is introduced and the opportunity to practice that skill in an authentic environment.

When you go 6 hours to a class you learn it then, but if you don't take it home and use it, if you just put it on the shelf and don't use it, it's probably not going to stay with you very much. #165

Most interviewees said that they use different learning strategies when acquiring a new computer skill than they use for other types of learning. Normally, they use reading as their major learning tool.

Everything else that I learn is through reading. There's nothing else that I would equate to the [tactile] way I learn computer. You need to learn that by doing it. #250

Normally I'm a reader, I don't want anybody to tell me- I want to read about it. [Computer learning] is very different from my normal learning, because it's a mechanical thing. It's because I didn't start out with computers in the beginning. If I had started out in the beginning and gone through it, I would have more confidence. #19

For computer learning, they describe their strategies as "tactile" and "learn by doing".

Tell me what I've got to do, show me how to do it, give me time to practice and make me show you that I did it. #245

The reason frequently given for this difference in learning strategies was the difficulty of reading computer manuals.

The last resort is to go to the manual. Because it's cumbersome, too wordy. I guess it's written by computer hackers and not readable by human beings. #340

A few individuals (mainly power users) do learn independently, using the manual.

[When I get a new program] I start doing this and that..I sort of figure out what it's doing and if I get stuck I'll always get out the manual. I usually try to figure it out myself first, before I call and bother someone. #339

Several people reported a preference for trial and error learning.

I just insisted on hunt and peck, crash and burn, and figure it out myself. #340

Some individuals reported using "old" technology to learn the new.

I like using handouts from classes.....I use that stuff. #339

Characteristics of Computer Learners

Most of the non-power users said they were only interested in learning particular skills, not the "whole picture".

All I want to know is what I need to know at that time. If they give me more information it's really annoying. #19

Power users tended to want to explore the limits of a particular software, to see all that it could do.

Oh, when I get a new program, I go from A to Z. I think that understanding how to use software beyond an application will help you enhance your ability to do that application. So I always go beyond that. #250

Respondents said they want to know the step-by-step procedures when learning a new software application. They want to be given this information up front, not by self directed discovery.

(Good computer trainers) listen to what I want and know I don't want the other stuff. The ability to just zero in on what you want I think is really important for this kind of thing. You don't want an explanation of why it does it, maybe later at some point you will want to know why, but wait until the person asks. What I want to do is get a job done. I just want to know do I press this or do I press that? #19

Many people reported that when they needed to learn something, they need it fast. They usually choose the fastest way around lapses in their computer skills.

It's a time thing....I learn quicker with hands-on instruction. I become frustrated trying to find it in the manual, going through it and then maybe not having it work. I would rather have someone who

knows what they are doing right here with me because it's quicker. #190

Stages of Computer Learning

Several people suggested that each new learning project is preceded by a period of denial that the new learning is necessary.

I guess my next learning project is Powerpoint. I've got to grit my teeth and get into it. #313

I need a push. I've got to see that if I don't learn to use this, I'm going to miss something. #325

Most of the power users reported that they reached a point in their computer learning when their understanding of a new software program or feature of the Internet became intuitive.

I think that there is a point at which your understanding of the computer gets to be so good that you can almost predict what a software will do. #250

Attitudes about Technology

Many respondents recognized two different groups of people - those who naturally excel at learning technology and those who struggle with it. Respondents often identified themselves as members of one of these groups.

I'm never going to become a computer geek. I'm not oriented that way. Whereas our computer lab person out here, she just takes to it like a fish to water. #313

Several people used literacy skills terms to describe computer skills.

[My computer learning stages are] the illiterate, then the somewhat literate and somewhat more literate. #240

Respondents (generally average users) report that their interest and enthusiasm for learning new things on the computer ebbs and flows over time.

I was enthusiastic 9 years ago. Now I pretty much don't want to have to learn anything about computers that I'm not going to be expected to use. #297

Several people said that their interest in computers has increased as they have learned to use computers to enhance their own creativity.

[Computers] are fun to use and they help me to create a document to look like I want it to. #218

Most respondents said they had concerns about technology, particularly regarding a reported lack of privacy.

I am very concerned about privacy of information. . . . a good hacker could maybe get into my files. #340

Many were also concerned about pornography on the Internet.

I'm concerned about pornography, which has been in the media. Because I have a child, that bothers me. #240

Several individuals mentioned possible social problems due to limited access to technology.

I see a growing gap between those who have access to computer technology and those who do not. #218

I am concerned that technology is moving along at a pace that the people in society cannot keep up with, therefore we are going to have a small number of people who are current in technology. It will lead to further divisions in society. #297

The power-users had different concerns, some of which revolved around the loss of personal contact as a result of electronic communication.

I look around and I see all these people in cyber this and cyber that and I think that there is something that is missed in terms of just human relationships. It's so easy to adopt a persona and pretend to be someone you're not. #128

The power-users also cautioned about some of the current uses of computers in the classroom.

My major concern is the over-emphasis of what it can do at this point. There needs to be an equal expenditure on books and on faculty. #250

A few individuals were concerned about addiction to computers, their own addiction and that of family members.

I don't like the addicting nature of it that I see in my kids. And I don't like the idea of leaving books for the computer. #19

Average or pre-users were more likely than power users to make blanket statements that technology was wonderful and an answer to many problems in society.

Concerns? I love it, I'm just so happy it's around. I guess there is some negative, but there is so much more positive out there. I'm not afraid of viruses or anything. All that's being worked out. All of these things are being handled and I just feel like it's going to be easier and easier. #313

Themes

As a result of conducting this study, it is safe to say that issues related to learning computer skills are important and a source of concern to many. Everyone I spoke with was fascinated by the topic and many said they would like to read my final report. Most of them reported that they had never taken time to really think about how they learned new computer skills.

The most powerful emotion I encountered among adult educators was a great feeling of anxiety, bordering on desperation, that they would fall behind in the terrific race to computerize. Many people were afraid that their children's skills were way beyond their own and that they would soon be out of control. Others told about new software programs at work which they were required to learn to use, replacing hand techniques which they felt were adequate. These people were resigned about their computer learning, and also a little cynical. They wondered if this new technology was really an improvement on the tried and true methods they were used to. As many people also reported that their equipment was slow and out of date, these changes appeared pointless.

By far, the most pressing motivation to learn new skills was need. When adults need to perform a specific task (write a report, communicate to a supervisor), they may be willing to learn, but that skill is all they want to know. When another need arises, they will return to a "learning" mode, but until then most people do not seek out new learning.

As people described their ways of learning computer skills, many told of using handwritten notes to remember which key to push when. We use what we know in order to make sense of something new. It was interesting to think of these notes as technology, albeit very old technology. Meek (1992) tells us: "New literacy technologies are always extensions of older ones. Where once scribes made copies of texts to be more widely read, today photocopiers do this at the speed of light. For all their comprehensive adaptability and usefulness, computerized networks are still, generally, print-based. Analysts and programmers are still in the business of keeping records."

Another insight into computer learning which emerged was the importance of drill and practice—the repeated performing of a discreet skill outside of any meaningful context until the learner feels competent and can apply the skill in different, meaningful contexts. Historically, "drill and practice" has been over-used as a teaching technique and is considered an inferior teaching technique in this day and age; most of the teachers I interviewed would probably deny using it in their adult education settings. And yet almost every average user praised this method as the most effective way for them to learn computer skills.

The average learner also expressed a strong desire to "know the rules". They did not want to know how a computer works electronically, but they did want to know how to make the computer do the same thing, every time. They wanted dependable rules to follow, in a consistent language. Of course, in a world where software and hardware becomes obsolete almost before it hits the shelf, this desire for dependability is often frustrated.

The adults I interviewed reported that they preferred to learn things by reading about them. They said that they would ask someone, if necessary, but they preferred to be independent and use a technology (reading) that they had mastered already. With computers, however, their learning strategy was different. Reading, for the most part, is out of the question—manuals are too difficult to understand.

Instead, adults said they needed a more kinesthetic approach—they wanted to watch someone do the task, or be told how to do it, and then practice it. They wanted to be independent computer learners, but they reported that they needed to be dependent before they could be independent.

I thought it was very interesting that the most accomplished computer users were also the most hesitant about technology being the answer to all of society's problems. They were also the most cautious about the use of technology in the classroom. They urged the thoughtful integration of technology, not as electronic work sheets, but in more authentic ways, such as word processing

As I listened to people tell me about their computer learning history, I began to wonder if there were identifiable stages to computer skill acquisition. I added the question, "Can you identify any stages in your computer learning?" to my interview about halfway through the 22 interviews. I also asked all of the computer trainers this question. I began to see the beginning of a development framework. The following framework was developed directly from interview data.

Computer Learning Stages: A Proposed Framework

Introduction Stage

The main characteristic of the Introduction Stage is the overcoming of anxiety about new learning. This often involves working through a feeling of denial about the necessity of this new learning project. Trainers report that the first thing a person needs to do is believe that they will not hurt the computer if they push the wrong key. At this stage, it is helpful to have an understanding of a few very simple, very basic computer terms. The barrage of new lingo in the world of computers can paralyze a new learner. In addition, they need a few relatively consistent rules about the computer - how to turn it on, how to use the mouse, how files are used, how to save text, how to print, etc. Also at this stage, learners need as small a trainer/learner ratio as possible and direct access to a computer.

Initial Stage

The next stage begins when the learner shows a willingness to experiment beyond the simple skills they have learned, and possibly beyond the software program in which they are trained. Computer learnng is still seen as a major task, but learners enter new learning projects with more enthusiasm and confidence. Learners at this stage also choose to ignore some of the more obtuse computer terms. While before they were very uncomfortable not being able to use "normal" English to communicate technological concepts, they are now more relaxed about computer jargon.

Integration Stage

In this stage, learners accept computers as an integral part of their daily lives. Almost without realizing it, a computer changes from being an expensive toy to a needed appliance. The discovery that this has happened generally comes when the office computer refuses to work and a project deadline hangs in the balance.

Intuition Stage

The final stage is characterized by an almost intuitive understanding of software. When a very competent user told me that he had created an algebra activity using a DOS spreadsheet, I asked how he had learned to do that and he replied that he "just knew how to do it; no one told me or showed me." Learners in this stage can move freely between many types of applications and often dip into programs for the first time and maneuver within them effortlessly. Some suggested that this ability comes after being exposed, in a more systematic way, to many kinds of software. I do not know if this stage is the normal end-point for most adults or if it requires a particular type of thinking skill. One of the trainers mused that we assume that if someone is "good at math", that they will learn computers quickly. But this was not always so. We were uncertain about the differences between mathematics ability, mechanical ability, and logic.

Another area which needs more study is the nature of these stages over time. The stages are named, not numbered, for this reason. Does one pass through them once, as a lifetime journey, or do

learners repeat the stages, in one form or another, with each new learning project? Can a learner reach stage four (Intuition) in word processing, only to begin again at stage one with using the Internet? How transferable are the skills from one application to another? This study was too limited to answer these questions.

Discussion

The interview results present a striking picture of computer learning as distinctively different from other adult learning. While the adult educators I spoke with prefer to be independent, self-directed learners in most of their learning projects, when learning computer skills they seem to "back up" to an earlier kind of learning, in which they were dependent upon others to help them each step of the way. The individuals I spoke with have been introduced to computers only as adults and therefore have little background experience on which to "attach" new learning about computers. I consider computer learning a unique adult learning project because this lack of background knowledge is an unusual feature of adult educators' learning projects.

A literature search found information about how young children learn to read, and I was interested to see the connections between the Stages of Literacy Development and the stages of computer learning I found in my transcripts. In *Becoming a Reader: A Developmental Approach to Reading Instruction*, Michael O'Donnell and Margo Wood describe five stages which they claim children pass through on their way to becoming competent adult readers. The stages are listed and described below.

Stages of Literacy Development

Emergent Reading

Learns concepts related to printed language: what it is for, how it is used, how it relates to speech. Also, extension of oral language and expansion of concepts and classification ability.

Initial Reading

Begins to identify words in print. Learns sight words. Can learn word identification strategies to figure out new words. Expects print to be meaningful, to find logic in the content, to predict and monitor their reading for meaning and sense-making.

Transitional

Can decode but is not yet fluent and independent. Needs extensive practice in easy to read materials. Learns to read by reading.

Basic Literacy

Can concentrate more on the context of reading than the act of reading. Can use reading competencies for different purposes. Literacy becomes permanently established; even if instruction is suspended, reading ability will not decline noticeably.

Refinement

Slow, continuous improvement. Has the ability to deal with specialized subjects and technical information as well as to read for personal growth and enjoyment.

There are similarities between these stages and the ones I found in my data. The Emergent and Initial Reading stages are roughly comparable to the Introduction computer learning stage and the rest follow from there. (See Figure 1)

The importance of seeing the necessity for learning computers is an important first step, just as learning the uses for written language is in the process of learning to read. Understanding how print is related to speech develops a connection between a known and unknown concept. Much of early computer learning does the same by using computers to do ordinary jobs and using known technology to learn the unknown.

The initial sight words in a child's journey to reading might be compared to the first computer skills an adult learns. Being able to recognize symbols and commands on computers away from the training site is an important step to gaining confidence with computing. Also, while learning one software program does not guarantee you will know others (phonic rules don't always work, either!) having control of a few commands does give the user skills to try when faced with a new program.

Practice is the by-word in the next reading stage, the Transitional stage, as it is in the Initial computer learning stage. Children "learn by reading" in this stage, and adults learn to compute by computing.

Figure 1

Literacy Development	Computer Learning
Emergent Reading basic concepts understands relationship of print to speech	**Introduction** overcoming anxiety sees a need to learn (understands relationship between computers and necessary tasks) learns simple commands
Initial Reading sight words begins decoding	
Transitional Practice!! learn to read by reading very aware of the process of reading	**Initial** Practice!! learn to compute by computing very aware of the process of computing
Basic Literacy more aware of content than of process literacy for a variety of purposes	**Integration** computers become more integrated into everyday life uses computers to get a job done, not just to practice
Refinement slow, continuous improvement can read more technical material reads for pleasure	**Intuition** smooth transition to new software more technical understanding computes for pleasure(?)

In the next stage—Basic Reading—children begin to read for content, not nearly as conscious of the act of reading itself. Adults working on their computer skills in the Integration Stage are now accepting computers into their daily routine; they don't sit down to the computer to practice, they sit down to get a job done.

Finally, Refinement occurs for both our readers and computer learners (Intuition Stage). Both show an increased ability to deal with specialized topics and applications and can move gracefully from one activity to another.

How appropriate is it to use a framework of children's reading skills acquisition to describe adults learning to use computers? My findings suggested that adults do not learn to use computers as they learn other things as adults. Also, Chall (1983) has suggested that the stages of literacy learning in children are comparable to stages in literacy learning among adult new readers. For example, she hypothesized that adult new readers, like children, are often focused on de-coding as a beginning step to reading proficiently. This emphasis on de-coding can be compared to a desire for discreet skill instruction in the early stages of computer learning in adults.

Conclusion

By exploring the connection between the ways in which adult educators go about learning to use computers and the ways in which their adult students learn how to read and write, teachers can gain a newly profound understanding of their students as fellow learners, as opposed to individuals who lack what the teacher has to give. This connection is strong, in more ways than just the similar stages discussed in the previous section.

The adults I spoke with and adult learners both tend to deny that they need skills before they "give up" and sign up for a class. Much of their motivation for learning, in both cases, is fear of falling behind, losing track of their children, missing out on job opportunities, and being "found out" by their peers who already possess the skills in question. Both groups tend to focus on learning discreet skills, using drill and practice, before they move on to more global and authentic ways of learning. Neither group is very student-directed to begin with. Asking a computer non-user what web site they want to visit is akin to asking a non-reader what consonant they would like to work on first.

New readers and beginning computer users alike are both interested in learning very practical skills for immediate use—learning for a purpose. Teachers and tutors often lament that their students don't seem to want to read for "the joy of reading" and resist reading for pleasure. Many of the people I spoke with are competent using computers to do specific tasks, but do not use computers for recreation and are quick to point out that they have no desire to be a "computer geek". These adult educators have full and interesting lives away from their computers, and if it were not for the changing times, they could easily anticipate being happy and productive without the Internet. So too, perhaps, with adult learners, who are respected among their friends, loved by their families, and trusted by their co-workers. They know they need to improve their reading skills, but that does not totally de-value the rest of their life experiences.

We in literacy often declare the importance of placing literacy within context. When we place our own selves within the context of being learners in the brave new world of technology, we begin to understand our fundamental humanity and kinship with all other people who find themselves lacking and struggling to become competent.

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Appendix A

Virginia Adult Educator Survey of Computer Usage

Please check Yes or No

What do you have?

- ☐ ☐ Do you have regular access to a computer at work? (daily)
- ☐ ☐ Do you have occasional access to a computer? (Perhaps it is in another person's office or classroom where you can use it once in a while.)
- ☐ ☐ Do you use a computer at home?

  Are your computers (at home and/or work): check all that apply

  ____ DOS compatible; ____ Macintosh; ____ Apple?
- ☐ ☐ Does a computer you use have a modem?

  Which communications software do you have? _____

  Which word processing program do you have? _____

How do you use it?

- ☐ ☐ Do you feel confident using a computer to write, edit or print letters or reports?
- ☐ ☐ Do you feel comfortable using a computer in the classroom, helping learners use instructional software to practice skills, etc.?
- ☐ ☐ Do you have an e-mail address?

  If yes, what is your e-mail address? _____
- ☐ ☐ Are you comfortable sending e-mail messages?
- ☐ ☐ Are you comfortable sending longer documents (such as reports or proposals) through e-mail?
- ☐ ☐ Can you download incoming messages or documents onto a disk or hard drive?
- ☐ ☐ Do you subscribe to any listserv or discussion group on the Internet?

  Which? _____
- ☐ ☐ Have you ever used the Internet to examine a library's holdings?
- ☐ ☐ Have you ever done an ERIC search on the Internet?
- ☐ ☐ Have you ever accessed the Virginia Adult Education and Literacy Resource Center via your computer?

What would you like to learn?

How would you like to be able to use a computer? Indicate by numbering (1 being the highest) your priorities for additional training.

_____word processing _____how to use instructional software

_____desktop publishing _____instructional software options

_____using the Internet _____e-mail ____other: _____

Comments: _____

We want to know more about how people learn to use computers so we can structure a staff development program. Check all that apply: I am an ____ Adult Ed. Teacher; ____ Administrator; ____ Aide; ____ Program Planner/Specialist; ____ Volunteer; ____ Other _____

Name _____ Daytime Phone _____

Address _____

Appendix B

Interview Questions

When did you first sit down at a computer?
Did anyone help you?
How did you begin learning?
Were you frustrated by anything?
How have you learned different computer skills since then?
Did you take any classes? What made the classes good or bad?
Do you use a manual?
Has your interest in learning to use the computer changed any over time?
Do you want to know different kinds of skills now?
Would you say that computer learning comes naturally or easily to you?
Do you learn computer skills the same way (learning strategies, modalities) you learn other skills as an adult?
How do you currently use the computer at home and at work?
How much time do you spend on the computer?
Do you play computer games?
What motivates you to learn a new skill on the computer?
How would you prefer to learn a new computer skill now?
Do you have any concerns about the use of computers or technology in general?

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